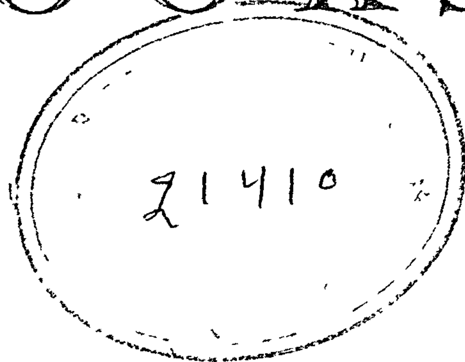
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Condensed

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Contents





The Nun's Story

A condensation of the book by

KATHRYN HULME

"The Nun's Story" is published by Frederick Muller, London

To outsiders, life in a convent seems so serene as to be almost motionless. But when a free-spirited young Belgian girl, Gaby Van der Mal, became Sister Luke, she learned that a nun's dedicated life is one of complex disciplines and constant inner struggle. Even more unexpectedly, she found herself projected into violent adventure when her Order placed her as a nurse, first in the disturbed ward of an asylum, then in a Congo mission hospital, and finally in war-torn Belgium, where the conflict within herself was at last resolved.

The Nun's Story, true in all essentials, is an absorbing picture of convent life as well as the portrait of a person who has been called "a woman immeasurably dear."

"A remarkably beautiful book."

—*The Sunday Times*

"Enthralling and moving."

—*The Daily Telegraph*



THE SHORT black cape hooked at the neck and dropped without flare to the middle of the forearms. It was odd to be thinking about Lourdes as she put it on, as though that recent experience had had something decisive to do with her choosing the religious life.

She bent her elbows and brought her hands together beneath the cape. It was a practice garment of sorts, to be replaced by the nun's robe after the six months' postulancy, after her hands would have learned to stay still and out of sight except when needed for nursing or for prayer. Forty other young women, mainly Belgian like herself, with a few English and Irish girls, stood with Gabrielle Van der Mal in the ante-room to the cloister, putting on similar capes but taking more time about it.

Lourdes, she thought. I'm not that impressionable. But quite suddenly she was riding again in the hospital train that made the annual pilgrimage, the only lay student nurse from the training school chosen by Sister William to help escort the convoy of bedridden patients from Belgium. The faith of the prostrate pilgrims frightened her. Her diagnostic eyes told her that some could not possibly live until Lourdes and she ran to Sister William crying, I've got three in the car who should be receiving last rites this very instant, Sister, and not a sound out of any of them except crazy hopes And Sister William had stopped her with a

look. No one will die en route, my child, they never do, she said What you are soon to see is beyond my competence to describe. Now say a *Pater* for having called faith a crazy hope and go back to your duties.

Lourdes was a bonfire in her memory. It was thousands of candles and burning cries and a week of rising suns over an esplanade where stretcher cases lay side by side, end to end, waiting for a priest to come with a monstrance that blazed in the sign of the cross above the stretchers. *O Jesus, Son of David, cure me. . . .* And there were cures. She had seen X-rays in the archives, made before and after baths in St. Bernadette's water; changes in tissue textures, even in the bone structures.

On the journey back to Belgium, taking care of the same number of cases she had escorted out, she had looked at the faces she bathed, still worn with disease. Inexplicably they had retained some of the glow that had played upon them in the candlelit Grotto at the foot of the Pyrenees.

Their happiness! she exclaimed to Sister William

Naturally, my child This is the *real* cure. Not those debatable X-rays This (Sister William inclined her head to the quiet sleeping-car as if the name of Jesus had been spoken) this is the visible grace given to all who go with faith.

And then Sister William had given her sleeve a little tug. Crazy hopes! the little nun whispered as she passed.

The pull at her sleeve had been more unusual than Sister William's teasing words, for it was the attention-drawing language of nun to nun, rather than of nun to lay person *As if I were one of them!* Gabrielle had thought with surprise.

And now she was one of them, or very soon to be. Consecutively she thought of the steps that had brought her to this prim parlour in a convent in Brussels She began with childhood, with the cook, Françoise, who had never cut into bread without first tapping the knife in the sign of the cross over the big round loaf. The child who watched the bread-cutting ritual went with the cook to first Mass every day. There was something wonderful and mysterious about candles and singing before sunlight Then there were the visits she used to make with her doctor father to homes in the provinces, every one with a big old-fashioned rosary hanging on the wall from two pegs, so that it fell heart-shaped. You seldom saw such visible piety now Nor did you see nowadays the great single eye in a triangle which used to be painted over the bars of

country cafés: the strange compelling design meant that the Eye of God was upon the place and no cursing would be permitted.

The old-fashioned religious childhood, she thought, though she had never really been a child—her three brothers had been children but she had been the replacement for the mother who had died so early. God, she thought now, was like one of the family and this above all is why I am here. I learned to love Him when I was very young. Before Jean . . . long, long before . . .

She pressed her clasped hands against her heart and looked at the Mistress of Postulants. She knew that she must be looking at *une Règle Vivante* a Living Rule, one of those of whom it was said that if the Holy Rule of the Order were ever destroyed it could be recaptured by studying such a perfect nun.

Sister Margarita's immense coif starched stiff as a shell and curving shell-like about the ageless Flemish face turned, almost imperceptibly, as the Mistress spoke in a voice exactly pitched to reach to the edge of the caped crowd and not a breath beyond. "Now we will go to the chapel." She opened soundlessly a heavy oak door, and Gabrielle saw how one hand dropped over the ring of keys hanging from her leather belt so they would not clink together as she moved

"You will follow me in pairs," said Sister Margarita. "We walk with eyes lowered and hands out of sight " She glided through the doorway and down a vaulted corridor towards bracketed candles with motionless flames

Gabrielle took a last look at the smaller door to the visitors' parlour, where good-byes to the families had just been said. Her father, the foremost chest surgeon and heart specialist in Belgium, would still be standing there. She could feel on the skin of her forehead the cross he had traced in farewell with his spatulate thumb. She could still taste the plump Zeeland oysters that he had ordered for her last meal in the world. Because he opposed his only daughter's entering the convent, he had called for all the tempting things of life to speak to her where he had failed, unaware that what was really a probing pain was her last view of him, over the coffee, his blue eyes looking at her through the smoke of his round-bowled meerschaum while he talked as to a colleague of his medical problems

He never once mentioned the convent or gave her a chance to tell him

that it was not only Lourdes which had brought her here, not heartbreak over his refusal to let her marry Jean (because Jean's mother had died in an insane asylum, and her doctor father could not put upon her the risk of reproducing madness), but the pressing sum of these things. . . . "And maybe, even, *cher Papa*," she whispered to the closed door as she passed it, "maybe even the way you brought us up." Why had her devout father opposed her entry? she wondered.

She turned the corner into the corridor and saw in one quick disobedient glance the whole chapel and the sisterhood that must replace in her heart all the lively affections she had ever known. It was a family of statues at which she stared. Some two hundred sisters were already on their knees in the long nave. The professed nuns in black veils knelt in the double row of carved stalls along either wall and the novices in white veils knelt, with nothing but air to support their backs, in three straight rows down the central aisle that ended at the altar No spine sagged, no muscle moved to disturb a marble fold Viewed from the visitors' gallery, where the Mistress led the postulants, it was a faceless community of draped and motionless torsos.

Jean seemed to slip in beside her as she tried to pray, taking the place of the caped figure kneeling at her right His hushed voice was without bitterness now as he reminded her of the many things she had given up, besides himself She pressed her palms more tightly against her eyes to darken the bright scenes his words evoked—of bicycle paths through Flanders, of high windy ledges in the Ardennes where they used to rest after climbs.

I'm going to miss your wide, wide world, Blessed Lord, she whispered tremulously, possibly even more than the man who opened it up for me. I must not have loved him enough to fly in the face of Papa's disapproval. I must have loved Papa more—or was it simply that old-fashioned obedience to a parent's wishes which gave me strength to resist Jean? Obedience—it's a key word in this sanctified place, so they tell us Obey —it comes from *audire*, to hear, to give ear to But I seemed to hear nothing, Blessed Lord, during all my weeks of tormenting indecision except Jean's voice calling challenges.

She heard nothing now except her own inner voice and the quickened breathing of her caped companion, who was looking through her locked fingers at the rows of nuns below.

For the first five days they were kept in a special wing, apart from the community of nuns, learning the signs that took the place of speech and the ways to open doors without rasp of hinge, accustoming their eyes to look downward and their hearts to lift up to the ultimate goal of being in constant conversation with God. It was, Gabrielle thought, like being in quarantine before a border crossing into a country of silence. They learned that country's laws in daily readings from the Holy Rule. The Rule was a guide-book to the cloistered life. It described the customs of poverty, chastity and obedience in minute detail You even learned that the long serge skirt must be lifted from the back when going downstairs, to prevent its wasteful wearing on stones

The new frontier extended into the unexplored terrain of interior silence, as well as the exterior silence that was a mark of the cloister.

"Interior silence," said Sister Margarita, "is one of the bases of the monastic life, one of the powers of God." Interior silence, Gabrielle repeated silently. That would be her Waterloo. How could you quell the rabble of memories? But I'll smother every voice that talks back to destroy my inner quiet, she said to herself. I don't know how I'll do this but I will. *All for Jesus . . . .*

All for Jesus, Sister William had said in the ward, pulling on the rubber gloves Say it, my dear students, every time you are called upon for what seems an impossible task. Then you can do anything with serenity. *All for Jesus.* They used the talisman when they met each other in hospital corridors carrying bedpans and kidney basins, murmuring *All for Jesus!* as they passed. Yet, although they said it sometimes with the hysterical irreverence of youth, it did really work.

There was one strand that tied Gabrielle already to the statuesque scene she looked at each morning in the chapel. This was the number assigned to her the day she was registered—1072, the number of a dead nun. The filament of number 1072 stretched far beyond the kneeling figures to a thatched hut in the Katanga district of the Belgian Congo. There, barely two months before, Sister Marie-Polycarpe, a missionary sister, had been killed by a black man gone berserk.

It was strange how alive the numbers were that each nun bore. Not one had been allowed to elapse since the Order was established at the end of the eighteenth century. Gabrielle was a leaf on a sturdy old vine

that never put forth a new shoot until every stem below was tipped with life.

Each time she looked at the sisterhood, with the reverent wonder she would always carry intact, she saw something unexpected. She, who had lived with nuns through all her boarding-school days, had never observed before how the breviary was held by every nun.

Sister Margarita held her breviary in the curved palm of her right hand with the thumb just touching the leather edge of the back cover. With the marker, she opened at the Office of the day and brought her left thumb, with a bit of paper beneath it, over the pages of the left side to hold them open

"This bit of paper," she told the postulants one day, "preserves the pages from stain. We each make our own little thumb pad. Mine, you see"—she held up the paper disk—"has a holy picture pasted upon it because I cannot paint prettily in water colour as many sisters do."

The Little Office in the breviary, she explained, was read seven times daily at appointed hours by every sister "Our work," said Sister Margarita, "does not always permit us to go to chapel for devotions. Sometimes we must read them in kitchens or schoolrooms—on trains or steamships. Thus, the care to keep the Little Office pure of soil. It must last a long time."

She let the bit of paper slip back between the pages as the book fell shut in her hand. Without possessiveness or pride she added, "This one was given to me when I made my first vows. It will be replaced next year on my silver jubilee"

The Living Rule rose from her chair and motioned the transfixed postulants, seated round her, to their feet "Now, my sisters, you will go to the chapel for your last prayers before you enter our blessed community." She smiled and nodded "Tomorrow is the day."

GABRIELLE's entrance into the community was a break with the past as clean as amputation.

The first day began with a sound she had never expected to hear inside this house of silence—an electric alarm that shrilled simultaneously in every corridor of the big dormitories where two hundred nuns slept in semi-partitioned cells Instantly, lights flashed on above the honeycombs of cells and the voice of the senior nun called out "Praised be Jesus

Christ!" The sound of two hundred bodies dropping to their knees was the clue to what to do next. A few sighs could be heard as the knees went down on the oak floor. Then a voice began the Hail Marys.

Even before she had taken a step inside the community, she had experienced more discipline than she had ever dreamed existed. The wooden planks under her sack, which was stuffed economically with old pulverized straw, had been as a bed of sand that gave the muscles no ease. The sheets of unbleached serge were the harsh equivalent of a hair shirt, and the four-thirty morning bell had stripped away the luxury of a slow natural awakening.

Gabrielle listened incredulously to the clear note of gladness in the *Aves* rising up to the Virgin from all the cells except hers. How could they sound so happy after a night on those sacks of straw?

She stood up and stripped her bed. She folded the covers as the Mistress of Postulants had demonstrated, in three exact folds each, then hung them over the chair. Then she heard the sisters dressing—starchy rustles, clinks of keys as leather belts were buckled on and the click of wooden beads as rosaries were hung from belts. She made an effort to ignore these involuntary private sounds as, during the night, she had tried to ignore the snores and muted cries of nightmares Sisters already dressed were gliding past her grey curtain.

She rehearsed her début. Meditations, Prime and Tierce. The admittance ceremony, then Mass Breakfast afterwards in the huge refectory. She must remember the silent upraised hand with waggling index to ask for water, the cutting motion of the back of one hand against the palm of the other to tell that bread was wanted, the down-hooked middle and index fingers to say, Fork please, the two humble taps on the breast to say, Excuse me.

Gabrielle pinned her veil over her hair and felt the edges to make sure it was not askew It was strange to be in a world without mirrors.

She pulled her curtain and stepped out into the corridor, realizing with difficulty that every member of the community including the Superior General was housed here. Artists, doctors of medicine and the humanities, cooks, laundresses, shoemaker nuns lived in those box-like, identical cells; and every nun had her cell changed each year to prevent her becoming attached to its location.

In the main corridor that led to the chapel, Gabrielle stepped quickly

into the file of nuns and novices walking along close to the walls. The humble effacing of self along the edges was what gave the convent its look of peace and quiet.

In the chapel, the lanes of kneeling nuns were an endless maze, with swirls of skirts covering the floor and very little space left for laggards to walk in. When she reached her place far down in front, she sank to her knees with the suddenness of complete exhaustion, as if she had been years on the way.

The morning prayer lasted fifteen minutes The two hundred voices were keyed low for it, like the grey light coming through the Gothic windows from a world still fast asleep. Then the postulants were led apart for the half-hour's meditation on a line from that day's Epistle: *If I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal*

The postulants looked at each other furtively when they were in the study hall. Gabrielle saw one of the Irish girls tying her shoelaces, and another with her black veil pinned so low it covered her eyebrows. "And . . . have . . not . . . charity," said Sister Margarita, picking up their thoughts and leading them to the crux of the matter.

When Sister Margarita snapped her metal cricket, Gabrielle rose and moved to the place that would ever be hers, third in the line of forty postulants. She was considered third oldest in the group because she had been third to register when the Order had opened its doors to new entrants. The only age she would henceforth have, her age in the religious life, had started. Man's time meant nothing here. Only the time that was given to God counted.

"Now that you know your places in chapel, I shall not lead you," said Sister Margarita. "But after Tierce, you will wait, and I shall take you to the chapter hall for the admittance ceremony." She started the procession forward with a nod.

The two hundred sisters were exactly as they had been left half an hour before. Folded down in the humblest position that the human can assume, they seemed to be shapes of strength When they began to sing the first Hour, Gabrielle had never heard anything more beautiful than those two treble choirs passing pure Gregorian chant back and forth as the first light of day slanted down from chapel windows.

Her fingers trembled as they turned the pages of her Little Office. Now

and again her eyes went back to lines of special beauty . . . *Emmanuel, He shall eat butter and honey . Thou didst descend like rain upon a fleece* . . . . The hundred voices in each opposing choir sang as from a single throat, as the Cantatrice, or choir mistress, a famed Gregorian scholar, walked ceaselessly up and down the aisles.

The devotions ended with breakfast still far away. It was astonishing how many things nuns had to do before anyone else was awake

The entire community gathered for the ritual of welcoming the postulants in the chapter hall. The postulants entered, made their hand-crossing bows to the Superior General, seated beneath an immense crucifix, then prostrated themselves, leaning on their elbows with faces buried in their hands.

"The Reverend Mother Emmanuel," Sister Margarita had said, "is the representative of Christ among us and, as such, she is loved by us."

"What do you ask, my children?" The voice seemed to come from a great distance.

"To be admitted into the congregation," the postulants said.

"Arise in the name of God." They arose to their knees

The Superior General was standing. She was tall and spare, and her plain face of goodness had a carved simplicity, like a Flemish painting; but when she smiled there was a sudden beauty that made you catch your breath. She had served as missionary in India, teacher in Poland, and supervisor of the Order's psychiatric institutions, including the heart-break home for idiot children that broke most nuns after a tour of duty there.

"Every one of us," said the Reverend Mother, "has prayed that you would have the strength to join us." She nodded right and left to the assembled nuns, who, in turn, nodded as one to the postulants

"Now, do not reject the graces that will come to you, my children. You will need all the strength they will bring. It is not easy to be a nun. It is a life of sacrifice and self-abnegation It is a life against nature."

A life against nature . . . the words startled Gabrielle. Her father had said exactly the same thing.

"A life against nature," the Superior General repeated without any inflection of emotion. "Poverty, chastity and obedience are extremely difficult" She reminded them that some would have more trouble than others and that never would any two react in the same way.

"But there are always the graces if you will pray for them." The Superior General paused. Then her right hand, knife-thin and long, appeared from beneath her scapular. She made the sign of the cross over them and gave them her benediction in Latin.

THE SIX MONTHS of postulancy were almost over. Three of Gabrielle's fellow postulants had dropped out and returned to the world.

Time in the convent belonged to the musical bronze bell in the chapel campanile which announced every activity of the close-packed days. This tolling bell, Sister Margarita had explained, was the voice of Christ calling them for His things: if, on the instant of its peal, you did not stop, mid-air, mid-voice, what you were doing, you committed an imperfection against the rule of obedience.

Had that been the stumbling block for her three departed comrades? Gabrielle wondered. Her own frustration smouldered because she could not learn to cut a word in half at the sound of the bell, nor teach her fingers to drop the pencil and leave a *y* without its tail, a *t* without its cross.

The campanile bell carried to the uttermost corners of the mother house. And if there were some noisy spots like the foundling nursery where you might just possibly miss it, there was always an older nun about who had the bells in her blood, who would lift her fist and pull twice down on air to pantomime that Christ was calling.

Once, to Gabrielle's shame and astonishment, a deaf-mute child propelled her hand, holding a glass of milk to his lips, away from him when the bell which he could not hear had sounded. She knew that if she could not achieve this simplest of all acts of obedience she would never come near the final goal of becoming obedient to the will of God for which these seeming idiosyncrasies of conduct were the gymnastic training.

The whole grilling routine demanded a conscious and complete submission of self; but there were rewards which came often enough to keep you trudging towards them. There was the renewal force of daily Mass. There was the singing of the Seven Hours spaced through the day. The most magic moment was the final anthem to the Virgin each night, just before the beginning of the grand silence, when all the sisters assembled in the chapel and sang the day to its close with the *Salve Regina*.

One by one the lights in the chapel would be extinguished until there

were left only the vigil light at the altar and the shaded lamp that illuminated the statue of the Virgin Mary. The awesome antiphon swelled in the dark and expanded it until it seemed to Gabrielle that every convent and remotest mission on the planet was somehow brought into her own chapel. Then, in the dark, the sisters filed out of the chapel line by line, the youngest at the head.

The local Mother Superior of the house (or Reverend Mother Emmanuel herself when her work schedule permitted) stood near the door to receive their reverence and to give them her benediction. Her youngest novice stood beside her holding the pot of holy water with which she sprinkled them You could not see clearly in the gloom but you felt sometimes on your face a few cool drops falling with the Latin words of blessing that sent you off to bed.

IT SEEMED to Gabrielle during the months of trial that the note-book in which each morning she recorded her first examination of conscience read like a record of rebellion against the Holy Rule. *Ran upstairs Talked after bell for grand silence No spirit of poverty in refectory again today; still longing for plate instead of wooden plank to eat from. . . .*

It might have helped, she thought, had she been able to compare notes with her struggling comrades, but they had all been dispersed from the first day, each to the department for which she had special qualifications.

Gabrielle was aware, however, of growing perceptions which seemed almost extra-sensory.

During her postulancy, a group of novices made their first vows and changed into the habit of the professed When, one morning, leaving the dormitory, she glanced into the cell from which a flustered new nun had emerged, she made nothing of the black apron hanging behind the pane of the half-open window. But later, when Sister Margarita was talking of the temptations of vanity, to explain why the Rule permitted nuns to clean their shoes only once weekly, Gabrielle knew in a flash that her sister had had a fierce temptation to see, in that darkened window-pane, how she looked in the transforming black.

Somehow, the air was charged with communication. It was amazing how much seemed to be said when Sister William, who had trained her in the nursing school, passed her in a corridor. *Don't struggle so alone, my sister,* said the sharp eyes that barely glanced at her. *Leave a little*

leeway for the graces It's a never-ending affair trying to be a good nun ... but never forget, When God orders, He gives ..." And she would be gone then and only her serge skirts would have spoken in the discreet rustle of uninterrupted passage.

God gave Gabrielle the strength to wake up each morning ready to start all over again. It struck her that perhaps each nun, no matter how old in the religious life, had to begin each day as if it were a first. A life against nature had to be fought for constantly.

As the day of vesture approached, there was much discussion of detachment. This was an alpine peak over which the Mistress of Postulants gently led them. For Gabrielle detachment from family and friends was an accomplished fact. Since her first day, her struggles had been so intense and absorbing she had written but one letter home.

Detachment from things would be no more difficult than detachment from family, she thought. Sister Margarita explained that the night before vesture they would be expected to make a total severance from all cherished personal possessions, and to cast into a basket for the poor any object that might attach them to a memory. Gabrielle touched the fine gold pencil from Jean which she kept in her skirt pocket. When the time came to drop it into the basket for the poor, she would say *All for Jesus* and feel less pain.

Sister Margarita spoke softly when she came to the cutting of the hair which would detach them from worldly appearances. "The hair," she said, "is the chief adornment of women in the world."

Gabrielle felt no emotion at the prospect of being shorn of her hair. She had seen the operation performed one day when she was sent to the laundry. Postulants from a previous group had been seated on wooden benches over which presided three nuns with clippers and shears. More interesting than the barbering was the sight of the nuns talking with the postulants—a special permission, she supposed, to ease the nervousness of the shorn ones, who had a tendency to giggle when they saw how the others looked.

Your photographs of Papa and the brothers, your gold pencil, your last gossipy letter from Tante Colette, your hair, she said to herself, and did not realize that there were ramifications of detachment which reached inward beyond the emotions associated with persons and places.

On the last evening before vesture they were given their nun's underclothing. Each piece was stitched with the postulant's number in the Order Gabrielle had the odd feeling, as she put on the black hand-knitted stockings with drawstrings at their tops and the long-sleeved chemise that came to the knees, that Sister Marie-Polycarpe was watching the garments numbered 1072 fill out with new life. She lifted the full black serge skirt over her shoulders and walked from wall to wall and back again, watching the heavy hem swinging.

The six items a nun might carry in her pockets were ready on her dressing-stand—a wallet of strong black leather for the Little Office and the conscience note-book; a small circular tin box in which was set a pincushion already studded with white-headed pins for the novice veil; a small rosary in a leather pouch; a penknife; a thimble; and a large cotton handkerchief in blue and white—the one bit of colour a nun might possess.

When she was vested, she would have one other permitted storage space—beneath her scapular, a sleeveless robe which dropped from the shoulders to the hem line, back and front, a symbol of the yoke of Christ. The leather belt buckled over it and made a handy pouch where such things as letters might be carried.

Gabrielle mentally reviewed her talk with the Superior General the afternoon before, when she had confided her secret hope of one day being a missionary sister in the Congo.

"We shall see, my child," said the Reverend Mother. "We select only the very strongest sisters for our missions. Your nursing qualifications would seem to make you a likely candidate, but you are still very far from being in the mould. Our mould is the armour of our missionaries, and it is not forged in a day. . . ."

Meditations, Prime, Tierce and Mass, and at seven they were ready for vesture. While the Monsignor from Malines was preaching to the community of nuns and the families in the guest section of the chapel the postulants filed into the sacristy, where the four highest ranking in the community—the Superior General, the Mother Superior, the Mistress of Novices and the Mistress of Postulants—were waiting like handmaidens to dress them. The farm girls blushed when these important personages dropped the white gowns over the black skirts and fitted the

board-stiff gimps under their chins. Waiting her turn, Gabrielle looked at the first ones dressed. When the coif was pulled forward round the face, Flemish, English and Irish identities disappeared and they all began to look alike. Like angels slightly surprised, Gabrielle thought

She discovered why they looked surprised when the Mistress pulled the gimp up and forward from the back, to make a starched frame about her face Side views were cut off as though by blinkers, which was just what the coif was designed to do. It kept you looking straight ahead towards God

Moving in procession down the chapel aisle, she looked towards the altar and the officiating priest. The Monsignor was intoning the *Veni Sponsa Christi*, which brought them forward to the altar one by one to have a circlet of orange blossom laid atop the veil. Gabrielle passed between the opposing choirs of nuns, singing joyously of crowns until eternity, as between two protecting walls that closed her off from everything save the steps of the altar which led her to her crown, and to the name by which she would henceforth be known—Sister Luke.

AFTERWARDS, it took a long time to embrace all the sisters of the community Their cheeks deep within the coif were hard to get at and she found it unnerving to feel on her arms the occasional pressure of their hands when they saw she had tears in her eyes She wanted to tell them that her tears were not for fear or self-pity, as with some of the novices, or for God-given joy as with others They were simply tears of relief, plain practical relief because she'd come to the cross-roads and crossed.

She was trembling when she went into the parlour to greet her second family. Her father came forward like an Edwardian gallant and took her two hands in his "You are thinner, Gabrielle" Tante Colette, his spinster sister, stood behind him with the brothers, holding the youngest by the hand

Her father seemed to find conversation difficult, and looked too often at his watch as he made small talk, while her aunt asked her sharply if she got enough to eat in this place As for her brothers, they shook hands gravely and could think of nothing to say. She was oddly relieved when the visiting hour came to an end. Her father's efforts to appear natural with her were painful and puzzling. Her sister novices seemed to have had similar experiences. They came from the parlour with troubled faces



and removed their circlets of orange blossom even before the Sacristaine came round to collect them. Was it the wreath? she wondered. Could that one symbol borrowed from the world have been the factor that held their families tongue-tied?

She had her answer unexpectedly that same night She had just taken over the desk in a hospital ward when all the patients' bells started ringing at once. She could not know that the same thing was happening in all the hospitals and homes of the mother house, that everywhere old patients had waited up to see the new novices She hurried into her ward.

All her patients had their eyes on the door. She started down the rows of beds, rearranging pillows, giving sips of water, pretending not to hear the whispers that broke the grand silence . . . *How beautiful you are, Sister!* . . . but hearing them with a sudden lift of heart as she saw the surprise in faded old eyes which had last seen her in the short dress of the postulant

As Papa saw me last, she thought, and blessed them silently for telling her what her father had been too confused to say.

"Ah, Sister, you make a beautiful nun!" they sighed with satisfaction.

CHAPTER 2

IN THE first year of Sister Luke's novitiate, her struggle turned into a lonely war against pride and self-will. No novice left the mother house during that formative year It was the cradle of the religious life, the mould that pressed, restrained and supported the wavering white forms that slowly shaped to strength.

A new group of postulants, over whom Sister Luke took precedence in speech, was below her now, and above were the first professed, who had made their first vows as she would make them at the end of this novitiate year. The fully professed supervised hospitals, schools and homes for the aged and foundlings, and, apart from duty, spoke with no one except themselves and the Superiors. Above all like a central sun was the revered person of the Reverend Mother Emmanuel.

You slept with the community, worked with it, ate and prayed with it. You were learning the hardest lesson of all—to live in harmony with women of all ages and of every kind. Sometimes the realization that she

would never be physically alone again would dismay Sister Luke more than any other aspect of the life she had chosen. Even more, she thought, than the culpa.

The culpa was the proclaiming before all your sisters of your failures in the Rule—faults that resulted from forgetfulness or rashness. It was obviously a training in charity and forbearance, but to Sister Luke it was a personal trial by fire which told her how far away was that perfection in humility towards which this weekly ordeal hammered and fashioned her.

It was held in the chapter hall every day except Sundays and feast days. Each nun had her day and time assigned and the dozen whose turn it was waited until the Superior of the house rapped twice with her gavel. Then the oldest in the group knelt and began her travail. *Ma Mère, I say my culpa. . . .*

As she heard certain sisters repeatedly proclaim the same imperfection, Sister Luke began to see where, in the community life, the muscles, the mind and the emotions lay. The nuns who most often proclaimed impetuous walking were the former sports enthusiasts. The intellectual nuns lost in the clouds of their private thoughts most frequently had forgotten to pass things at table. And there was one choir nun with a face like St. Cecilia's who regularly proclaimed that she had been "carried off by a bird song" or that she had broken the grand silence by whispering "Listen!" when tree-frogs sang at night.

Sometimes when she knelt after her culpa and listened to the voice of a sister quietly reporting faults she had been unaware of, Sister Luke would suddenly have the impression that she was listening to the voice of the community grieving as a single body over its imperfections.

Midway in the novitiate, when the novices were stronger but not strong enough, the Superior began to mete out bigger penances than the saying of five *Aves* for a repeated fault. The penances were now performed in the refectory where the sisters sat on benches at the U-shaped tables. Their coarse napkins of unbleached sacking were tucked into the starched bibs and anchored on the table, as individual tablecloths, by the wooden planks that served as plates, so that in a sideways glance down the table it seemed to Sister Luke that all the nuns were connected to it by a continuous membrane of poverty.

There were several penances, but to Sister Luke's fastidious soul the

begging of the soup—in which the penitent had to beg two spoonfuls for her own bowl from each nun at the table—was the most severe. She went through it several times, and, as the pride of Gabrielle Van der Mal crumbled within her, Sister Luke had her first haunting glimpse of humility when she looked at the prideless place within her that was being prepared for its growth. Was there anywhere in the outside world a training and tempering comparable to this?

In that year, besides earning her nursing degree and a diploma in psychiatric nursing, the data of struggle accumulated within Sister Luke. If her reasonable mind often looked askance at the smallness of the things she struggled for, she reminded herself that nothing was trivial in the eyes of God. Each simplest act in the cloister, each hidden intention, had to be polished and perfected like the tiny stones of a mysterious mosaic which had no meaning when looked at one by one but which, fitted together, made a pattern: the formation of the nun. But she was too close to see it

Once when she sat cutting beans with her sister novices, her eyes wandered round the circle they formed beneath the trees. She looked at the young flushed faces and listened to the exclamations of the fast-fingered ones No one uttered a regret for not being allowed to stroll that day through the gardens. No one looked up from her aproned lap to the flowering chestnuts and the slow drift of summer clouds Their discipline showed so sweetly without stress or strain it nearly brought tears to her eyes

She thought, this discipline is surely more than any of us could ever need She could not know, on that summer day in 1927, that in little more than a decade their ordered world would be the epicentre of an earthquake. Some of these sisters who sat beside her would disappear in the holocaust, not to be heard from for years until, at last, a few would begin to reappear one by one . . . out of Poland, Czechoslovakia, China, out of all the sad new Godless Iron Curtain lands. They would reappear with worn pictures of saints sewn into the hems of disguising lay clothes, and rosaries hidden in their shoes, and the world would wonder how they had got through. Prayers and faith, they would say. They would have forgotten how the steel had got under their scapulars, it was so long ago that they had learned to be nuns

One day when Sister Luke had to beg her soup, for coming late to

devotions from the hospital, she lifted her eyes and really saw the Superior General, the Reverend Mother Emmanuel, for the first time. She had begun with the highest ranking, who was that day the Superior General, just returned from her annual visits to the affiliated houses of the Order in England, Holland, France and Poland. Waiting for the soup to be doled into her bowl, she had looked up, bleak with despair. She was not expecting to be looked at, but the Superior General's face was bent towards her and gently smiling. The smile reached down and touched her and seemed to say quite plainly, *Why! You poor little thing!* It was the only time she ever came near to crying in her penance.

From that moment her captivated eyes followed the tall spare figure whenever the Superior General was present. The Reverend Mother Emmanuel's back never touched the back of a chair no matter how weary she might be Yet, somehow, she always looked relaxed In the chapel, during the half-hour of meditation, her eyes never turned first to her book of spiritual reading; she could apparently enter into immediate colloquy with God without the help of inspirational phrases. The moment she knelt at her *prie-dieu* she seemed to be regarding Him directly. Stealing looks at the venerated figure, Sister Luke understood how the early artists came to paint the graces descending as rays of gold towards an upturned face. It was never difficult to imagine, when the Superior General was in colloquy with God, that you saw bright bands slanting down towards her in those grey dawns before sunrise.

But it was in the recreation that she saw the quintessence of the Superior General's power and her regenerating force.

Attendance at the recreation was obligatory, whether in the recreation-room or the cloister garden, and you always sat in a circle, the formation of charity Everyone shared smiles and words, nobody was left out, not even the ones like Sister Luke who wished to be. You could take any chair that you wished but every other aspect of the recreation was fixed by custom

You came to the recreation twice daily with your work-bag made of pieces of worn serge skirts which even the Vestiaire, with all her weaving arts, could no longer mend for wearing use In the bag you carried the work you must do while you sat in the circle. The work had to be something manual like darning or knitting. The conversation must be

of something safe, hung up on high, like the Japanese lanterns for Sister Eudoxie's jubilee—something general that would not rip open the secret places of a woman's heart. *The sisters should always have a serene visage, and a gracious air . . .*

Sometimes Sister Luke would look round the circle with a kind of desperate urgency that sought, in her companions' faces, a hint of the inner rebellion she herself felt at this static sewing circle. She saw only sweet discipline without strain. The words she had beaten back again and again since vesture would speak then so loudly in her thoughts that she would look up with alarm to see if anyone else had heard. *I don't belong here I can't even conform to the life in the recreation. I'm not strong enough. . . .*

Then one day Reverend Mother Emmanuel visited the novices' recreation and for Sister Luke the dreaded, boring period was never again the same. When the Superior General removed her handwork from her work-bag, Sister Luke saw that it was a stocking, but she knew it was no stocking the Reverend Mother could ever have worn. There was no heel left in it, only a great oval hole such as the sabots of the garden or laundry nuns ground out of the backs of their stockings.

That was Sister Luke's only clear clue as to what happened to the recreation when the Superior General sat among them. Charity was visible in her scholarly hands expertly darning the stocking of one of their humblest sisters. Then it came alive in her deep voice as she singled them out one by one and spoke as if she had been working beside them in the laundries where those boilers were giving trouble again; or in the children's hospital where measles had broken out. Her peculiar force flowed out from her and you could follow its passage round the circle in smiles on faces that seldom smiled, in the relaxed tones of the white-clad novices whose voices, as the day for the taking of vows approached, showed the nervous strain they were labouring under.

A real physician of the soul, Sister Luke thought. When she looked at the lean self-abnegating face bent over a darning egg, she was certain that she was looking at the imitation of Christ so perfected as to pass almost unperceived. Years later, in far communities, she could superimpose at will over the figure of the local Mother Superior the spare outlines of the Reverend Mother Emmanuel and feel again the healing art of those dark eyes piercing through to the inner struggle.

THE WEEK of retreat before the taking of vows was over. Then the Mistress of Novices gathered up her flock and led them to the chapter hall for final instructions.

She described the ritual at the altar and the signing there of their written promise of obedience to God for the period of three years, after which they would make their perpetual vows. The parchment would go with them, wherever they might be sent; and when they died it would be placed in their folded hands to go with them into the grave

"Try to avoid singularization," the Mistress told them. "Anything that singularizes is but the old self asserting itself, a sign that we have not succeeded in suppressing it so that we may be born again in the Christ."

And yet, Sister Luke thought, our very life has singularized us from the rest of the world. Even if we did not wear habits of archaic distinction, the singularization would still be seen . . in the way we walk, in the way we talk with the possessives *my* and *mine* and the words *I cannot* gone from our vocabularies. And conscience, she thought, which everyone is born with but which our Rule has toughened with twice-daily exercise until it has grown from a still small voice to a vital organ within us.

She glanced at two of her companions who, it was rumoured, were not going to make their vows How long would it take them to unlearn the nun's gliding walk, the gestureless speech, the downcast eyes? It's going to be terribly difficult for them at first, she thought with compassion, with a year and a half of this iron discipline to undo.

Suscipe me, Domine . . .

The two hundred sisters sang them to their vows. Before advancing to the altar they lay prostrate in the centre of the nave, the visible symbol of their dying to the world. Then the treble choirs raised them up with the *Gloria Patri* and sent them to the altar in steps as measured as the Gregorian chant which presently the officiating Monsignor carried on in a grave baritone:

Save Thy handmaiden, O Lord, for in Thee is her hope. Let her be good and humble. Let her be exalted by obedience Let her be bound to

peace. Let her be constant in prayer. Lastly, O Lord, we beg Thee to receive graciously her offerings . . . .

And mine to You, O Lord, are the things I do at the bedside of the dying. Mine to You is the certainty of Your nearness when hands twist the coverlets and I quickly bring a priest or pastor or rabbi to bridge the gap between the dying one and You. I have not much more, besides love, than skilled fingers, a strong back and tireless feet to offer Mine to You, O Lord . .

The expert hands of a professed nun put on the black scapular and veil. The bronze crucifix, leather belt and rosary came next, and then the white choir cape, worn always in the chapel by the professed, was dropped over her shoulders to fall in chiselled folds to a train on the floor The choir sang *Confirma Hoc Deus* as Sister Luke signed her name in religion on the high altar.

Later, in the crowded parlour, she could not at once see her family. Tante Colette was wiping her eyes and calling, "Gabrielle, here we are!" but she no longer responded to that name. Patiently, politely, very slowly she circled the room until she came upon her father

He looked exactly as he had a year ago, after vesture, and he said the same words, "You are thinner, *ma petite* Gaby." Only the music that lingered in her ears was different. *He has set a seal on my face so I may know no other love but His* And then she thought to say, "It's probably the effect of the black scapular, *cher Papa*"

The effect of the black veil and scapular was visible in another way when the parlour doors closed on their families and the newly professed returned to the community She saw the first signs of it in the last recreation the newly professed were to have together before being sent away next morning to other houses Some of her companions, she observed, had the look of sleep-walkers Their wide-open eyes seemed to be focused on a distant glory as they made their bows to the presiding Mistress

Those somnambulists, Sister Luke told herself, are the potential mystics separating themselves She had heard about this The tendency towards mysticism, she knew, was always a problem in an Order where work and contemplation went hand in hand. And no one could know if it was the real thing or simply an unconscious singularization.

Now the presiding Mistress drew the dreamers back into the sewing circle with lively vignettes of their prospective Mothers Superior. Sister Luke noted with secret amusement that the Mistress found a way to liken one of those Superiors to Saint Theresa of Avila, the Spanish nun who, though one of the greatest mystics, was also a remarkably practical and astute woman, reputed to have said of a group of starry-eyed novices, "We don't need any more saints here, but rather plenty of strong arms for scrubbing."

The shining new crucifix hanging over her heart gave Sister Luke no illusion that her own spiritual condition had grown more rarefied. She felt once more a tremendous relief. God in His infinite mercy had accepted her humble offerings.

Much of the newly professed nuns' show of perfection vanished that evening when they waited in the corridor outside the office of the Mistress of Novices Only a few like Sister Luke were able to fight back the tears. She was going to enter the School of Tropical Medicine, and would board in a convent school near the university She could not tell if her inner excitement was for the thought of escape from the big community to a small one, where long study hours would dispense her from much of the community life; or whether it stemmed from the realization that she was at last on her way towards that diploma in tropical medicine which was the passport her Order required for nursing supervisors in the Congo.

It was her turn now to enter the office of the Mistress of Novices. The Mistress was sitting at her desk. A slight flush warmed her face, as if she too had been touched by the departure emotions. She spoke kindly to Sister Luke of her behaviour as a postulant and novice

Her lips curved in a smile as she said, "You are very adaptable, Sister Luke. You were one of the few who never asked to be excused from the community life."

"The common life, the community, has been my discipline," said Sister Luke "I have had to force myself to participate in it, I made myself an automaton."

The Mistress shook her head

"That is not the way, Sister. Not as an automaton." She paused to consider. "Once, long ago, I too found community life pure agony. Then

I thought about the Christ who took to Himself the humblest of companions. Quite possibly He could not abide the smell of fish or the frequently childish talk of those simple disciples. Yet He lived with them and spoke with them in the picturesque parables they could understand. He who had confounded the scholars of the temple when only twelve years old. That, my sister, was the first community. That is our example."

Sister Luke knew she would never forget the lesson or the way it had been given Her joy at escaping to a smaller community, with dispensations from its common life, turned to a feeling of shame. "I have felt sometimes I was exploiting the community," she said. "Taking so much from it, and giving so little back."

"Because you say that, you will learn." The Mistress gave her a last smile, then became a Living Rule again. "Now," she said, "you go forth. Some of your sisters you will like, some you will not. Remember. the golden rule for antipathy is to do a service for the one your spirit withdraws from. And for yourself," she said more slowly, "a doctor's daughter accustomed to comfort and social position, try to be the little donkey of Jesus who goes his way without prodding. Take up every burden without inner murmuring. Take it like that little donkey who carried the hope of the world up the stony slopes of Jerusalem."

Sister Luke emerged from the Mistress's office just like all her companions, with tears in her eyes.

They left the mother house next morning after Mass, and the sisters sang them out of chapel *and may the Angel Raphael accompany us in the way, and may we return in peace, health and joy unto our own home*

Their papier-mâché suit-cases packed by Sister Eudoxie, the Vestiaire, were standing by the main door of the mother house. They said good-bye to each other with their eyes as they climbed into their separate buses—some for short journeys within the Kingdom of Belgium, others destined to travel far out on the branches of the family tree of their congregation

Sister Luke said the *Itinerary* silently in communion with the sisters singing them on their way *May the God of our salvation give us a prosperous journey* . .

THE SCHOOL of Tropical Medicine was housed in a handsome château

in the suburbs of Brussels. The student nuns travelled to it by tram from the boarding-school run by their Order.

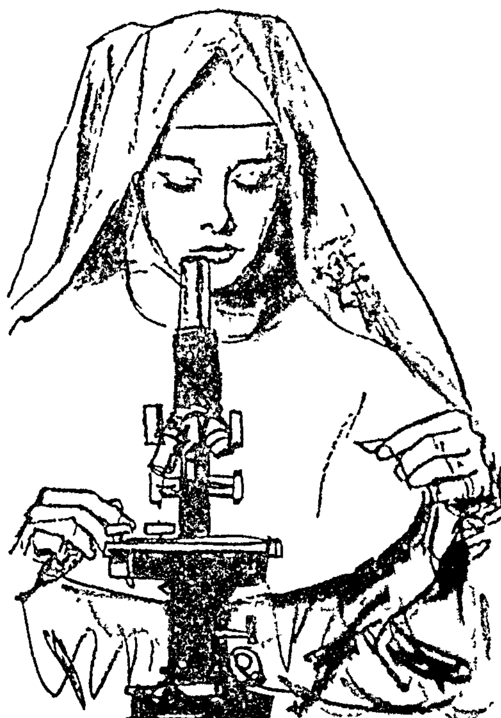
They were four and they always sat together in the tram, each reading her Little Office Sister Pauline, who carried the tram fare and did all the necessary talking, had been promoted to supervisor and furloughed home from the Congo to secure a diploma in tropical medicine. From the moment Sister Luke set eyes on her lean and leathery face, she knew she had a major problem in antipathy to overcome. The sun-faded eyes were colourless, and the icy monosyllables with which Sister Pauline answered her eager questions about the Congo conveyed the impression that queries about that great domain were impudent.

This possessive jealousy for the Congo was even more evident in the university professors who taught them. These bearded medical pioneers, prematurely aged by long service in the Congo, were eaten gaunt by malaria and their passionate love for the land to which they now had to send the young doctors, priests, nuns and lay nurses who sat before them. Sister Luke loved all the professors For her, the lecture-room was a home-coming into the medical world She loved most of all Dr. Goovaerts, who knew her father and recognized her one day, sitting there before him in the habit of a nun.

"This revered sister," he said then, "was looking through her father's microscope when most children of her age were turning kaleidoscopes before their eyes"

Afterwards, at the lunch hour when the four nuns drew apart from the other students to eat their sandwiches in silence in the château park and recite Sext and None, Sister Pauline looked at her with aversion, and before the school bell summoned them for miscroscopy she turned the recreational talk to the subject of singularization. The senior nun obviously believed Sister Luke had deliberately drawn attention to herself in class

The microscope classes gave Sister Luke her first real view of the Congo. Here in a long room with many windows she sat every afternoon for eight months with one eye glued to the eyepiece of her microscope. Down the draw-tube was the microscopic world of the Congo basin, the beautiful and deadly shapes which caused leprosy, sleeping sickness, yaws, malaria and elephantiasis. This is the Congo that I can make mine, she would think. This is the service that I prayed for.



She went through box after box of slides, always ahead of the other students. Sister Pauline's eyes were often upon her, registering disapproval for her lack of charity in seeming to show up, by fast accomplishment, the other students, who proceeded much more slowly with none of her excited recognition.

Sister Luke knew that Sister Pauline was having even more trouble than the others. Here, she thought compassionately, was the way to counteract what seemed a mutual antipathy.

When she showed the other nuns how to see the difference between the bacillus Koch that caused tuberculosis and the bacillus Hansen that caused leprosy, she raised her voice, risking being conspicuous, so Sister Pauline might hear.

In the evenings when she sat studying with her companions in their large bedroom, it would have been simple to say to her dour senior, "My notes and drawings are good, Sister Pauline Why don't you take a look?" Instead, she would gaze worriedly at her note-book and finally say, "Would it be asking too much to have you take a look at my notes, Sister? I'm afraid I may have some mistakes" While Sister Pauline avidly read the notes, Sister Luke would leave the common study table and go to her corner of the room to study.

Such elaborate convent formulæ of prideless speech when you felt a justifiable pride, of charitable concealment of knowledge, often seemed to her like hypocrisy Was it God's wish that His vowed ones be thus? Thomas doubted and was promptly invited by the Christ to come forward and put his hand in the Wound Robust and direct, she reflected, not like this indirect thing I do night after night, trying to win over a sister I would never wish to see again

Since she had left the mother house, her emotions seemed to have sprung up, like weeds, pale stalks of like and dislike, of pride and desire, which swiftly turned green. Her hopes for Congo service were now a passionate obsession. Soon she could no longer counterbalance her antipathy for Sister Pauline with charitable deceits. A fortnight before the final tests, she decided to take her trouble to the local Mother Superior.

Mother Marcella was a woman of great interior richness who ruled her brilliant small community of teaching nuns with enchanting grace. She was deft in her choice of spiritual reading for the four transient sisters in her care—a chapter on humility for the proud, on obedience for the headstrong Sister Luke found chapters on humility marked the most often for her.

On the evening when she stood outside the door of Mother Marcella's study, she was aware that her humility had a slight shading of the heroic. She would follow whatever advice the Mother Superior might give, she told herself firmly, even if it meant darning Sister Pauline's stockings or cleaning her shoes each week. Nothing told her that she was standing at a cross-road in her religious life.

She knocked, entered with a bow, knelt and lifted two fingers to her lips requesting permission to speak.

"Benedicite," said Mother Marcella.

"Dominus." Sister Luke looked up. The large crucifix behind the Superior's chair gave the impression it was meant to convey, that she was not kneeling before a woman.

"I am in trouble, *ma Mère* I have come to ask the grace of your counsel. It is Sister Pauline. What should I do?"

With scientific detachment, she recited the growth of her antipathy and the steps she had taken in vain to overcome it.

Mother Marcella waited a few moments before replying. Her long white fingers moved up and down on the crucifix beneath her bib, seeming to take thought from the touch.

"You are intelligent, Sister," she said at last. "I know that you can face things I would not say to others Sister Pauline has already come to me."

Sister Luke looked steadily into the Superior's eyes

"She has many complaints," said Mother Marcella. "In sum, she thinks you are an intellectual snob. She does not believe you will ever

achieve humility She even wonders why you ever came to the convent. Her antipathy, I believe, is based on fear that she will not pass the examinations or that she will be far below you in grade. It can be difficult for an older sister to be superseded by a first-professed, as Sister Pauline most certainly will be by you."

Sister Luke felt her heartbeat quicken. The small frugal room seemed to close in about her like a box. The Mother Superior's silence was eloquent with indecision. Then Sister Luke saw the hand tighten about the crucifix.

"You have been given a truly great opportunity to make a sacrifice for God," said Mother Marcella "You asked what you might do." Again she fell silent, weighing her words. "Would you, Sister Luke, be big enough, tall enough, to fail your examinations to offer Him humility?"

Sister Luke swayed on her knees as if the floor had moved She stared with shock at her Superior The luminous eyes held her with infinite compassion, knowing the full measure of what had been asked But had she the right to suggest such a thing? Sister Luke asked herself wildly. Her hands beneath her scapular seemed to twist out the answer—Anyone has the right in our God-vowed world, if it is seen that you lack humility You had this coming to you from the start. You were even proud of your submission when you came to this room to confess defeat

She had a question one she would be asking for the rest of her religious life "How can I know He would want this from me?"

"Go and ask Him," said the Superior.

Sister Luke bowed her head for the benediction Then she went immediately to the chapel and buried her face in her hands

She saw herself standing before Dr Goovaerts and the examining board, making wrong answers to questions while her father's friend gazed at her with unbelief and disgust

"Oh God," she whispered, "it would be wasting all those months of Your time. Would I not please You in taking knowledge where it is needed? Oh God, don't ask me to give up the Congo!" But the Mistress of Novices spoke to her out of memory *"Though you toil in kitchens, schoolrooms and hospitals and produce many good works in His name, He is pleased only in how you grow inwardly"* She knew too that out of His eternal time God chose His moment to offer the most perfect alliance with each individual soul And this is mine, she thought I can

take it or I can leave it If I take it, He might make no sign whatsoever Or He might shower me with graces and bring me close to sainthood. If I don't take it . . . .

"This I cannot do, O Lord."

Then she saw in the inner awful mirror of the mirrorless convent world all the cords that bound her to the selves of pride. She saw her pride of intellect, of judgment, of her ability to achieve whatever she set out to do.

"Must I now do this for You, O my God? Do You really ask it?" She tasted the tears in her hands, and with them she tasted the most poignant experience of the nun—the deep silence between Christ and the soul in trouble.

While she waited for His inspiring, for an answer through her conscience, she had her first deep experience of real humility as she saw how little she had of it. After all the systematic slayings of small prides one by one, for two years, she had touched only the outer edges of that jungle where I, Me and Mine flourished in a thousand forms.

"Humility" She whispered the soft syllables longingly.

The Irish girls in the mother house once taught her a couplet from one of their country's poets.

Humility, that low, sweet root
From which all heavenly virtues shoot

After a long while she left the chapel.

THE LAST two weeks of the course were so fearful in their intensity that Sister Luke's pallor passed unnoticed She was preparing for two examinations, one of herself in humility and the other, the easier one, in tropical medicine

In classes she studied with concentration Even had she known that she would find the strength to fail deliberately, her nun's training would have made it impossible for her to fritter away the final weeks. She was there to study.

Dr. Goovaerts grew almost savage as he took them through the last big review of the total course Once in the final days he fell in step beside Sister Luke after class and her heart stopped when he told her that he

had telephoned her father about her performance in the course. Papa! She saw him smiling and nodding as he listened to his old friend saying, "Your daughter isn't doing too badly . . . not badly at all, in fact."

Then she saw with her father's eyes of the world the incredible sacrifice that had been suggested to her. It would be beyond any mentality outside the cloister to understand the simple logic of it. The simple logic, she went over it again and again, is that I am still proud and that I add to Christ's sorrows by being so. I kept looking for ways to be a good nun. Now a way has been pointed out. I need only say in the oral exams that the tsetse fly seems to have a tendency to alight on white instead of on black. I could say, O Lord, that enlargement of the lymphatic glands is *not* a characteristic sign of sleeping sickness. *What am I going to say? Will You tell me when the time comes?*

She skipped most of the final study hours and spent the time in the chapel. There was always that abyss of silence. The vigil light became the fevered eye of Dr. Goovaerts, growing larger and redder as she stared at it and waited for some Voice other than her own or her professor's.

"Is it wise to go so often to the chapel?" asked Sister Pauline. "Should we not stay close to our studies? The mother house will offer tomorrow's Mass for our intention. The help we need will be asked for us."

It gave Sister Luke an odd turn to hear this. The months away from the mother house had not dimmed her memory of the sisters, and the perfection of their daily Mass. Tomorrow, she thought, they will sing their hearts into the *Kyrie* for us . . . for me.

She had no idea what she was going to do.

She didn't know until her turn came for the orals before the examining board. Dr. Goovaerts, with six doctors beside him at the long table, gave no sign of recognition when she came in the door. But when she was seated his eyes flashed her a look of connivance. "I shall defer to my eminent colleagues for the first question," he said. His challenging tone seemed to say, "Trip this one up if you can, my friends."

The malariologist cleared his throat and delivered the first question. "The board would like to hear from the Sister a résumé of the special clinical types of pernicious malaria, naming no less than four of its forms."

She counted five of the forms on her fingers beneath the scapular—cerebral, algid, bilious remittent fever, blackwater fever and the

broncho-pneumonic—while the doctor continued, "You may take your time, Sister. *We* have been working on this since the eighteen-eighties."

She took time to say inwardly, *Thy will* . . . . Then she began to speak.

SHE KNEW she had passed the examinations before the official results were published. On the eighth and final day, Dr. Goovaerts walked towards the door with the four sisters. "You may telephone your father tonight and tell him to have a platter of his favourite oysters delivered to the convent for you," he said to Sister Luke

"We are not permitted to use the telephone for personal messages, *Monsieur le Docteur,*" replied Sister Pauline for her.

His glance of amusement told Sister Luke that he would telephone to her father himself.

That night in the recreation, Mother Marcella announced to the assemblage that all four sisters had passed the examination. She handed out their diplomas, and then drew Sister Luke apart "I do not know," she said, "if I should regret my suggestion to you, Sister. You passed fourth in the class of eighty."

"And I do not know, *ma Mère,* who inspired the answers to the questions." She looked at her parchment. "Nevertheless, this is not mine It belongs to the congregation."

"Ah yes, the congregation will profit, Sister Luke." The Superior was silent for a moment "But your failure," she said wistfully, "would have been a gift to God."

CHAPTER 3

THE LETTER from the mother house did not explain why Sister Luke was not to be sent directly to the Congo. She was to be attached for an indefinite time to the mental-diseases sanatorium run by her Order in southern Belgium. She told herself hopefully that her diploma in psychiatric nursing must be the reason for this, that the actual practice in mental nursing was intended to make her more valuable in the Congo service.

She could not resist asking Sister Pauline on their last recreation together if there was much insanity in the Congo. Sister Pauline was a

changed woman since she had received her diploma. All the vinegar had gone out of her face.

"Everybody is a *little* crazy in the Congo, my sister," she said "There is something about the country itself that deranges. The grandeur of everything, the tremendous horizons . . . ah, those horizons!" Her face filled with life as she talked about the land to which she was returning. "I would say, however, that our natives are more normal than any race on earth . . except when they drink the mysterious beer they brew from roots, maybe manioc root, no one knows for sure. Then sometimes they go berserk if they cannot dance it off." She smiled, as if she heard the drums. Then she went on: "They call the beer *simba*—lion, in their language."

"Simba," said Sister Luke. Her first word in Kiswahili was as easy as a sigh to say

SHE LEFT the *pensionnat* directly from the refectory after breakfast for the trip to her new madhouse world. It turned out to be a self-sustaining, village-sized enclosure surrounded by high walls inside which the female inmates muttered and cursed—"Species of crow!" "Species of sorceress!"—at the tallest nuns Sister Luke had ever seen. Except for the dangerously demented, nobody here was physically restrained.

The Superior, an Englishwoman, was a magnificent nun who ruled her world of a thousand deranged females and a hundred overworked nuns with courage and poise. Mother Christophe never dramatized, always minimized, and taught her nuns to do the same

Sister Luke's first impression of her new community was that everyone in it had the most dominating eyes she had ever looked into Every nun's eyes looked up and out, a complete reversal of cloister practice. Their attention to exterior signs and sounds was phenomenally developed since their very lives depended on sharp and constant observation. The practical lay nurses who assisted them looked like female giants—stout farm girls trained by the nuns.

"Our practical nurses," said Mother Christophe, "can stand only a four-hour shift, but our sisters take duty for eight or ten hours at a stretch"

Mother Christophe took Sister Luke to the *observatoire,* where all incoming patients were kept for a week or two under the observation of

the top alienists of Belgium. From there, they went to the pavilion of the paying patients "You will be attached to this pavilion," the Superior said

Beyond the private rooms was a long corridor of padded cells for dangerous lunatics Each cell had an inch-thick window with louvered opening at the top. The Superior spoke to those who looked out on them as they passed. "This one," she said, indicating a handsome blonde whose china-blue eyes smiled sweetly at Sister Luke, "thinks she is Archangel Gabriel and we call her that." When they had moved on, she said, "You may never enter that cell alone. Always two or three."

At the end of the long corridor were the bathrooms where physiotherapy for the violent cases was given. Through the hermetically sealed windows Sister Luke looked in upon twelve tubs, each covered by a stout canvas with a hole at one end through which protruded a babbling madwoman's head. A single nun sat in the middle of the bath scene watching. "Because the atmosphere in there is so disturbing," said Mother Christophe, "we want to provide an occasional relief for the sister on duty. This is why we needed you. You are the only sister in transit who has had psychiatric training."

"I understand, *ma Mère*."

Mother Christophe read instantly the relief Sister Luke had been unable to conceal. "You are still very young to go to the Congo," she said pleasantly, "though we know your heart is already there. Our Reverend Mother Emmanuel perhaps would not have spared you to us had you been a little older, a little more in the mould."

The Superior unlocked the door. It was almost impossible to believe that only twelve maniacs could produce the waves of singing, cursing and praying that mounted, broke and began again in the humid tiled room. The seated nun stood up and made her deep hand-crossing bow to the Superior. The antique salutation so full of grace stopped the howls from the tubs for an instant while the wild eyes watched. Then the howling resumed while the nun wrote her name on a slip of paper and showed it with a smile to Sister Luke. *Soeur Marie de Jésus* Sister Luke felt an instant bond with the tall nun standing beside her with her eyes ever on the neck-holes of the tub covers, turning only for an instant to let them out of the door with her skeleton key, and then locking herself in again with her maniacs and their terrible cries.

She was trembling when she emerged from the pavilion, and she tried to shake off an odd foreboding. She had already met two of the three persons who were going to live in her memory. The third was a tall elderly woman coming towards them now through the begonia beds

The woman had a brown paper bag on her head. Her walk caught Sister Luke's attention even more than the bag It was the convent walk, swayless and smooth. When the patient looked up, her face had the gentleness of a child's.

"That is the Abbess," said Mother Christophe. "She is an easy patient so long as you keep her supplied with paper bags. She believes they are coifs."

"One would imagine, *ma Mère,* that she had been a nun."

"She was," said the Superior. "She is laicized now, of course. Once she was an Abbess in a contemplative order."

Sister Luke cast a startled look back at the paper-coifed woman who had once been a Living Rule. The Abbess had a finger to her lips as a fellow inmate chattered at her. She was maintaining the rule of silence.

In time, Sister Luke learned to use her eyes as her experienced sisters did—like swivelling lenses that moved from one to the other of her charges She accustomed herself to praying in chapel with her eyes wide open when it was her turn to chaperon inmates to Mass She learned that sedatives were to be given only as a last resort, that the approach even to a dangerous patient was through gentle persuasive reasoning and that everything *they* did was to be accepted as if it were normal.

Mother Christophe permitted her nuns to talk shop in the recreation long enough for them to unwind from the tensions of the day Sister Luke followed the talk with burning interest this was her first real experience of a recreation with Living Rules. She discovered that they had specialities in their perfecting—some concentrating on the poverty vow, some on obedience and some on charity; all practising pure, unique acts in a modern world that elsewhere chose the careful middle way of tepid souls. It was odd to hear them speak of their struggles in self-perfecting almost in the same breath with their attempts to reason with demented patients.

This idea of trying to reason with lesioned brains seemed to Sister Luke, in the beginning, almost a folly in itself The toll it took from

the nuns was never visible in the wards but in the evenings when they appeared in recreation their faces were as bleached as their coifs. Her father would have called it nonsensical when one round of hypos would have done the trick of quietening. But, she reminded herself, that was not the way of nuns, who believed that in each mumbling patient there lived a soul undamaged which might, just possibly, be reached through patience, courage and constant care.

From the first, Sister Luke felt herself drawn to two of the patients—the Abbess, who was only gently queer, and the Archangel Gabriel, who was a schizophrenic.

The Abbess's peculiarity was poverty. She had been suspected of practising many secret self-denials and had been regarded as a saint by the nuns of her order until the day they found her in the convent library with many rare illuminated manuscripts cut up into bits All that gold, she told the nuns, was a sign of lack of poverty. For poverty's sake she now slept on the floor in the middle of her private apartment, on a mattress she had long since shredded into small squares.

Sister Luke never saw the mad side of the old nun because she never tried to get her off her scrap heap on to a bed. The Abbess called her "my child," as if she were one of her nuns, and sometimes she would ask Sister Luke quite lucid questions about her spiritual progress. Once, on an impulse, Sister Luke told her about her hopes for a Congo assignment.

"That will be of course as God wills," said the Abbess. "But you must continue praying for it and I, meanwhile, will add my prayers to yours." It gave Sister Luke a curious consolation each time she saw the Abbess present in the chapel and praying with great grace and sanctity.

The Archangel Gabriel, on the other hand, could never be trusted anywhere. It took three of the practical nurses to wrestle her into the sack-like garment that encased her whole body and left just the feet free so that she could hop with small steps down the corridor to the baths. But when she hopped past the desk where Sister Luke was on duty, she would always pause and call out *"Allô, chérie!"* with joyful recognition.

Sister Luke was certain that one day she would penetrate the weird inner world of the Archangel. When coherent, the Archangel would talk sanely about the Percheron horses she used to breed—a draught

beast far superior, she said proudly, to the heavily fetlocked English breeds. Such fetlocks, she told Sister Luke, were no good in furrows.

"Sister Luke is the little friend of the Archangel," said the nuns in recreation. Their nods of approval would ordinarily have embarrassed her and warned her that she nursed a secret pride in her ability with the deranged But she believed that she was being the little donkey of the community when she offered to take the night watch for Sister Marie on Mother Christophe's name-day fête. There was to be a party in the recreation with the special indulgence of cakes and chocolate.

"You are young to be alone at that desk in the wing of the dangerous patients," said the Superior, "and since it was Sister Marie's duty, I've already given permission to the two practical nurses to attend the party."

"The patients know me, *ma Mère*"

Mother Christophe pondered.

"Very well, then. But only from eight to nine, after which Sister Marie will resume"

THE PADDED-CELL corridor was quiet. Sister Luke walked past the heavy windows and looked in upon each patient. Tranquillized by their baths, most of them were in their beds.

She sat down at her desk, putting from her thoughts the anxiety in Sister Marie's voice when she had said, "Promise, Sister, to ring this bell if any one of them raps for attention."

It was pleasant to be alone. She took from beneath her scapular Tante Colette's last letter and reread the lines that had amused her: *Your father is incensed that they waste you in that idiot asylum What can you possibly learn in such a place?* Obedience, she thought I'll try to explain that next time I'm permitted to write

There was a gentle rapping. It was the Archangel standing at her cell window in her long white nightgown and asking plaintively for a drink of water.

"I'm thirsty, *chérie*," she whispered upward towards the louvers, showing awareness of people around her who slept Sister Luke searched the blue eyes. They had no more wildness than a summer sky.

Sister Luke went to the tap and drew a paper cup of water. It seemed ridiculous for so small a matter to ring the bell and bring Sister Marie out of the party. She could open the door just a crack, hand in the paper

cup and shut it quickly while the Archangel drank Two years of obedience fell away from her as she walked towards the cell alone.

She took the skeleton key from her ring and held it in her left hand and the cup in her right. The Archangel waited, as relaxed as a sleepy child. Sister Luke slid the key in the lock, turned the latch and kept her eyes on the Archangel's face as she thrust the cup through the crack. The next instant, her whole body followed the cup.

The steel fingers that had closed about her wrist yanked her off her feet. Before she landed inside the cell, the Archangel had her veil stripped off. The starched coif and headbands gave way like tissue paper while she was still on her knees. She lunged upward, caught one of the wild arms while the other reached for her scapular and tore it away. There wasn't a sound except the crazed whisper, *"Chérie! Chérie!"* and once the clink of her belt, key ring and crucifix falling together on the padded floor. She thought of the skeleton key mercifully still in the door. Twice, as she wrestled from wall to wall, she kicked the door open wider. Her prayers were continuous gasps. She was fighting not only for her own life but for the lives of the fifteen others in that corridor It took several moments for the Archangel to get her skirts off, the tough serge first, then the petticoats. Stripped then of the encumbering habit, she was lighter and faster on her feet than the ponderous maniac. *God, O God* Just the holy name, no time or breath for more *God, O God . . .* The Archangel stooped to pull off a stocking. The strength she prayed for came to her then. She thrust the madwoman off balance and for an instant was free of the flying arms. In that instant she got out of the door and slammed it shut.

She had no idea how long she clung to the long iron key her hand could not pull from the lock The Archangel's face distorted with grief was flattened against the glass one inch from her own. At last Sister Luke stumbled down the corridor and rang the bell.

Sister Marie and the two practical nurses appeared promptly. Sister Marie looked at her without judgment or shock and reached for a sheet to cover her up. The two nurses waited with folded arms, incurious, as if it were a common event to relieve a bareheaded nun, stripped of her habit.

As soon as she could gasp "The Archangel . . ." the nurses walked down the corridor, unfolding their arms as they went.



Sister Marie's compassionate eyes examined scratches and bruises as she wrapped the sheet round Sister Luke. With merciful delicacy, she made no reference to the deep inner wound of failure in obedience which Sister Luke had inflicted upon herself.

"Pride got me in . . . prayer got me out," Sister Luke whispered.

"Don't try to talk," said Sister Marie as she pulled up a corner of the sheet and looped it round the bared head "I would probably have done the same thing." She picked up the telephone and called the infirmary to bring a stretcher.

Sister Luke began to sob, not for the scandal of her situation, nor for the pain of her bruises, but for that extra charity from the tall calm sister. Tears stung her puffed eyelids as she watched the two practical nurses coming back with the pieces of her destroyed habit. There, neatly stacked in their big red hands, was the result of two years of trying to please God with obedience. She looked up at Sister Marie.

"This . . ." she managed to say, "could never happen to you."

The powerful eyes stopped the emotion that thickened her voice. "Only the Almighty God can know that," said Sister Marie. She put out her arms and took the torn habit from the nurses flat on her upturned palms as if it were still a whole garment. The gesture recalled to Sister Luke the Living Rules of the mother house coming towards her before vows with her new black veil and scapular held just so and she began to cry again, but without a sound now.

THE EXTRAORDINARY discreetness of the convent fell over the affair. Mother Christophe heard her culpa in private, which was the custom for exceptional faults. The Superior listened without comment to the truths Sister Luke had discovered about herself during the three days she lay in the infirmary. They had ugly names like pride and sense of heroism. No notes were taken, but Sister Luke knew as she shaped each halting word that she herself was dictating the report which would go forward to the mother house to be judged by Reverend Mother Emmanuel. She remembered how just a few months ago she had told another Superior of another kind of struggle, and she thought, had I succeeded in humility for Him then, would this be happening to me now?

When she was returned to the community her sisters charitably ignored the green-blue condition of her eyelids, her bound wrists, and

even the brand-new habit which, ordinarily, would have drawn their women's eyes. It made her feel like a ghost

On duty, it was the same. The Superior wisely reassigned her to the place where she had learned a lesson that could not be improved upon. The Archangel called out *"Allô, chérie"* each day as she hopped past the desk on the way to the baths. Even the practical nurses suppressed their gusty admiration for her muscles and bravery, as though they too had entered into the conspiracy of compassion which seemed to leave her the only living being in the community with a memory.

But not quite . . . there was the Abbess. Sister Luke sent her assistant to attend the old nun until the last trace of blacked eyes had vanished. She used the polished brass lid of the inkwell as a mirror, noting the imperfection in her conscience note-book and writing firmly beside it: *For charity's sake, not to disturb a patient unduly*

Some day, she thought wryly, I'll learn with God's help where the Rule ends and charity begins and not have to fill my note-book with these split hairs. . . .

The Abbess was waiting for her. "I missed you very much, my child," she said. Her sweet sensitive face showed concern. "Did she hurt you?" the old nun asked quietly.

Sister Luke knelt swiftly to take her pulse. How could she have known? One could conclude only that she preserved undamaged the nun's ability to feel an atmosphere and knew what was going on within it.

"No, Sister, no . . . I only hurt myself"

The Abbess never spoke of it again. But day after day thereafter, seeming as sane as any of her guardians, she entertained Sister Luke with lucid discussions on dogma or with the exquisite songs and sonnets she composed. Sister Luke had the impression that the old nun, out of her great knowledge of the soul, was making a conscious effort to draw her forth from self-reproach, to make her smile again.

She actually did smile on the last afternoon of her month of day duty when she heard herself saying to the Abbess a happy colloquialism straight out of her childhood. She had been thinking of the joy of relieving Sister Marie after her month of night duty, and of how her sister's weary eyes would glow with gratitude when she appeared exactly on time. "I will pray that your vigil tonight will be without incident," the Abbess had said with a beautiful smile.

"Don't worry, Sister. Everything will roll on wheels tonight!"

Everything will roll on wheels, she said again to herself as she walked between the begonia beds in the moonlight. There were never any problems when you took over the duty after a sister as perfect as Sister Marie.

Because she had come a few moments too early, she stood looking at the duplex pavilion in the moonlight. Downstairs were the private rooms, the corridor of padded cells and the treatment tubs beyond. Two nurses were on duty, one awake and the other asleep, and a single nun who never slept—Sister Henri that night—was on duty at the desk where the alarm bell was.

At the back of the hall, a flight of stairs went up to the dormitory where slept the non-suicides, the patients who had seizures only once or twice a year. Up there was Sister Marie with her back to the glass entrance door and her eyes on the twenty beds spaced round three sides of the room In a cubicle beyond the fourth wall slept a practical nurse whom Sister Marie could awaken if she had to leave the dormitory.

Sister Luke smiled as she unlocked the front door and entered the quiet house to become a part of its smooth-running perfection. Sister Henri smiled back at her, and wrote her entrance time in the log—one minute to one. Sister Luke opened the door at the back of the hall, shut it soundlessly behind her and climbed the stairs.

As she fitted her key into the glass door at the head of the stairs, she took in the whole room at a glance—the twenty beds with their motionless forms, the dimmed lights above and, on the desk, the shaded lamp which made Sister Marie's back look like a slice of shadow leaning forward against the light, leaning . . . but the head was not right! It was lying forward on the arms

Her heart missed a beat as she rattled her key noisily before she entered the room, to spare Sister Marie the ignominy of being found asleep on duty. "O God," she prayed, "let her wake up all by herself "

She fumbled audibly at the light switch, still staring at the dark silhouette that would not move. Then she switched on the bright lights and saw the ebony knife-handle sticking out of the back of Sister Marie's black scapular

Her horror-filled eyes swept the dormitory. The motionless lumps under covers never moved but here and there she caught a leer, a glint

from eyes watching to see what she would do. "I'll do exactly what Sister Marie would do," she whispered frantically to herself, adding, as Sister Marie would have done, ". . . with the help of God Almighty."

She walked to the desk, dropped her trembling fingers over her sister's pulse and pretended to read the page of notes on which the dead hand lay. Then she pressed the alarm bell, which was not heard in the dormitory.

Sister Henri and one assistant appeared from below, their faces rising like two blanched moons behind the glass door. Then they were inside the dormitory, moving with studied calm, the practical nurse going to the cubicle to awaken the sleeping nurse, then the two of them returning side by side, unhurried. Sister Henri made a lifting motion.

They never looked at the knife-handle as they bent to lift the chair with Sister Marie sitting on it Sister Henri, clutching her crucifix with one white-knuckled hand, opened the door for the nurses and closed it with a barely audible click Then she came towards Sister Luke, whose habit alone seemed to be holding her up. "We'll have another chair for you in a moment," she said, in a voice meant to reach beyond the desk. She lowered her tone and added, "Unless you would prefer to be relieved this night, as indeed you may."

"Thank you, Sister, I prefer to stay." Sister Luke forced her voice up and said, "I'll not need a chair tonight." She faced the room squarely while Sister Henri made her silent exit.

Both nuns knew that nothing more could happen The knife—stolen from a pantry or smuggled in—was no longer in the dormitory. Only that leering awareness in the few who had seen the violent act, and the memory, in just one deranged brain, of having committed it, needed to be subdued, to be confused by calm and eventually blotted out.

As if nothing had happened . . . .

THE RULE supported her that night, like a separate organ of command, having no contact with her mind or emotions. She stepped backward and dimmed the lights She stepped forward to the desk, picked up Sister Marie's notes, looked from them to each numbered bed listed upon them. Something in her screamed that the hand that wrote what she was reading had been warm when she had touched it, but the Rule let no sound emerge. A thought formed half-way—*If I hadn't stood in the*

moonlight for the perfection of arriving exactly on the minute—and the Rule suppressed the rest of it.

She read on, holding up the log without a quiver. Then she began to patrol the room, clicking her beads as she paced slowly with her eyes uplifted to the great mirrors hung aslant at each end. The mirror towards which she faced gave her a view of the three beds along the end wall, to which her back was turned, and of the beds along the long wall as she passed them one by one. Her mirrored reflection was the reflection of any nun pacing back and forth on a quiet night, seeming to say her rosary. It was the Rule walking.

She watched the Rule walking through the whole of that night and through the thirty that followed. Pacing the dim-lit dormitory, she watched how the Rule turned the nun as on wheels when someone in a bed stirred in the mirrored reflection, how it held her there in calm when a grimacing woman climbed from the bed and padded off to the lavatory, how it turned her again and made her resume her walk when the patient, returning, appeared in the mirror and walked cat-like behind the veiled figure until she came to the empty bed and climbed into it, without being looked at or told to.

She was earning the Congo in that month-long night but she had no idea of this when it ended. She had crossed out that hope long ago.

IN THE spring of 1932 she was called back to the mother house to make her final vows. Her group of first-professed seemed smaller than it was three years ago, but neither she nor any of her companions turned to count, as they sat in a circle with the Mistress of Novices.

"You are all here," said the Mistress, "except Sisters Rose and Bernadette, who were put back three months at their own request, Sister Vitalie, who was advised to wait by our Reverend Mother Emmanuel, and Sister Godefrieda, who has gone out."

Then you could almost hear the clicking of their thoughts. Am *I* ready for perpetual vows? Am I worthy?

"Perpetual," Sister Luke said to herself as if reading a cross-roads sign she had come to sooner than expected. Her hand clung to her crucifix.

That evening she went to the Mistress "I believe it would be better if I wait," she said. "There is still too much struggle against the natural."

"No, Sister Luke, I would not counsel postponement for you." The

Mistress gazed at her thoughtfully. "You have a fighting soul. For such, there can never be too much struggle."

She leaned slightly across the desk. "We need combative souls, Sister Luke, not simply the phlegmatic ones who accept everything without question. Never forget that God tests His real friends more severely than the lukewarm ones."

Sister Luke felt the persuasive pull of the dark eyes. "We have our Holy Rule. It is the stern, slow way to sanctity but a very sure one. And remember, Sister," the Mistress added very softly, "you would not be here had you not been called."

The familiar words heard so often during her novitiate gave her a startling impression, as if she had been asking Christ to wait a little before making that final step towards Him.

The Mistress clasped her hands. Her voice dropped so low she might have been talking to herself. "Sometimes, God lets us know why we were called. Sometimes not. Meanwhile, the vows keep us where we want to be—near to Him in poverty, chastity and obedience."

TEN DAYS later, Sister Luke made her final vows in the only way her honest soul could formulate them. As she lay face down on the carpet, she whispered for God's ear alone the words He knew were in her heart: "I cannot promise You until death . . . but I shall try."

Next morning she was summoned to the Superior General's office and informed that she was to report to the Vestiaire to be measured for the white cotton habit of the Congo nuns.

In a daze she heard what the Reverend Mother Emmanuel was saying: "You must never lose the awareness that, in yourself, you are only an instrument. An instrument is nothing until it is lifted. No one knows how it is lifted. It may be the prayers of some poor bedridden sister who longed for the missions. . . ."

CHAPTER 4

A COMMERCIAL photographer from Antwerp took a picture of the departure for the Congo. Months later Sister Luke saw it in the little magazine of the congregation. The nuns stood at the ship's rail, herself and Sister Augustine, professor of Latin and the humanities, who was

making her second departure and showed it in her slightly haughty expression.

Her own face in the photograph looked like a small triangle of white stone with fixed eyes and a mouth tightly drawn. That must have been when the band started playing the Belgian anthem, the *Brabançonne,* she thought. And then it all came back—the whipping flags and tossed confetti, the world catching her up at that moment as if to say, *You too! You are outward bound for adventure!*—until she saw below her on the crowded quay the Gothic figure of the Reverend Mother Emmanuel. The Reverend Mother Emmanuel seemed to be waving like all the others. Then she saw the figure-of-eight motion of the long hand, sending little signs of the cross over the widening space between ship and shore

Voices from the pier carried over the water. "Don't forget to come back rich." "Don't forget to come back " "Don't forget . . . ." The white hand signalled, "Don't forget you are only an instrument. Only an instrument, remember . . . ." Slowly the ship turned Then Sister Augustine plucked her sleeve and she came away from the rail

The silent summons brought her back into the orbit of the mother house. She followed the senior nun to the cabin and knelt with her to pray. But later, right outside her cabin door, the modern world in glittering microcosm lay in wait again for her Its music struck the first notes of a waltz as she and Sister Augustine, bound to silence, stepped from the cabin into a lounge full of laughing people The waltz was one she knew. She had not heard it for four and a half years, but its words were suddenly all there singing in her memory. Inattentive as a deaf-mute, Sister Augustine led the way to the promenade deck. She had long ago forgotten the impact the world could have after the sequestered years of preparation.

In the world The familiar convent phrase meant everywhere else except here and everyone else except us. It meant this ship now. The familiar music pursued her round the scrubbed decks, reviving dance partners out of her past. The passengers smiled, inviting speech. The notice-boards listed films she longed to see. Eighteen days of this, she thought It was to be the sternest of all her tests of detachment. You were expected to live on that ship as if still behind walls

During the first week she walked the deck so often she might have

been going on foot to the Congo. Sometimes she held her Office open. trying to read. Sometimes her hands were clasped beneath her scapular like wrestlers

She and Sister Augustine retired to their cabin at eight thirty, said the evening prayers and the *Salve Regina* and were in bed with lights out by nine Then the night life of the ship began.

You heard the ball-room music first It drifted through the passageways in the changing tempos of waltzes and fox-trots with intermittent flurries of handclaps calling for encores. Much later, after the music ended, there were shufflings and whispers from the promenade deck and sometimes against the port-hole curtain the shadow of two heads. "Don't watch," said the nun inside you and you looked away quickly while there was still a space of moonlight between the two profiles.

You looked at the white gimp and scapular swinging from a clothes-hanger against the door By staring at it, you could make it draw your thought so that, when at last you fell asleep, you would not dream again that you were still in the world, a young unfettered girl with flying hair.

There was one image which Sister Luke could always put between herself and the distractions. It was the native bush station to which she was destined. It could never stir a worldly association because everything there was totally new to her. The people were black. The music was drums. Even the thorn trees could never recall any tree she had ever sat under before

Afterwards, she wondered why it had not been perfectly clear, from the moment she began using that bush station as a screen, that she would be kept in the world until her detachment from it was perfected.

Off Dakar, a radiogram came to the ship addressed to Sister Augustine and delivered to her in the dining-saloon Sister Luke knew by the flash of sympathy in the usually impersonal eyes that the message concerned herself

"Your assignment has been changed, Sister Luke. There is a place on the government pay-roll which our Reverend Mother Emmanuel has chosen you to fill . . . in the hospital for Europeans in . . ."

In a bustling city with newspapers and telephones, smoke-stacks and slag heaps. . . . Her disappointment cut like a knife as she watched Sister Augustine folding the radiogram corner to corner with care.

Sister Luke waited until she could speak calmly. Then she said,

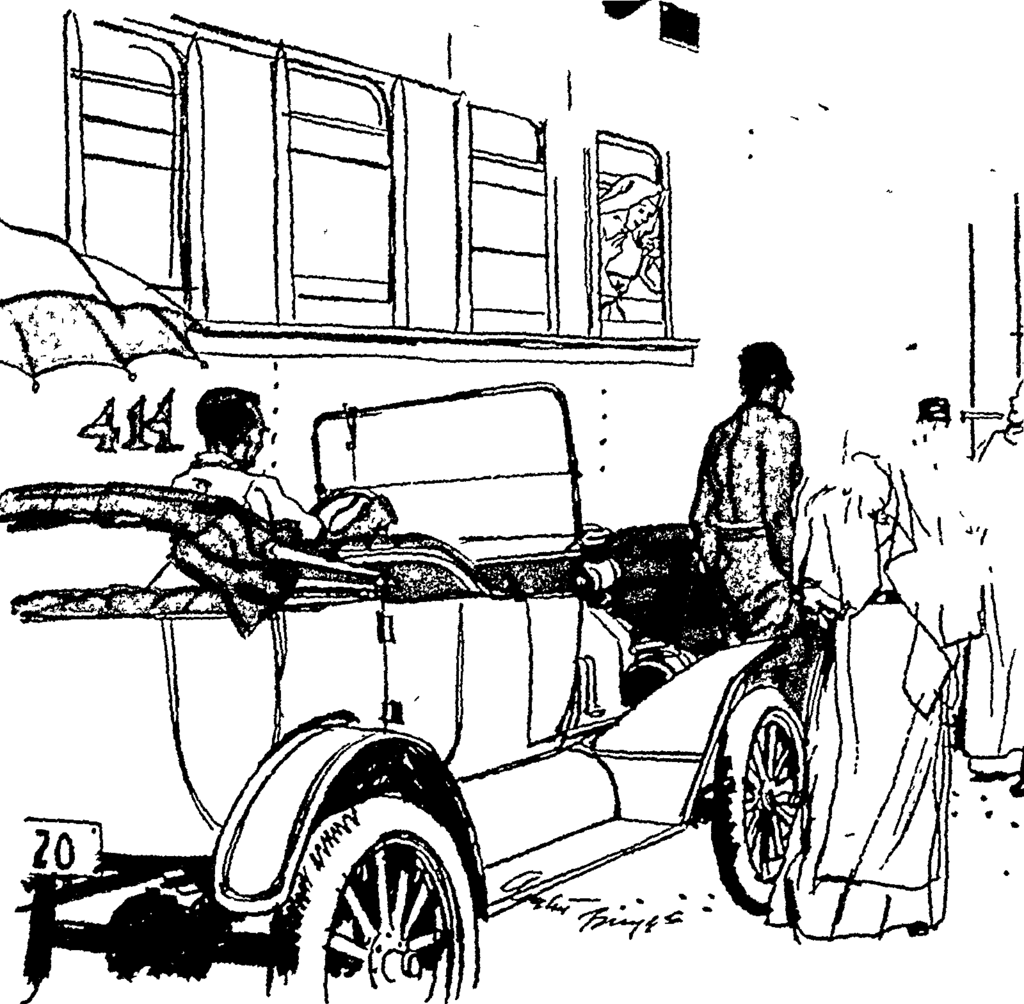
"When God orders, He gives . . ." and she thought how bitterness, shock, even a flash of rebellion were laid low by such words of obedience. Something always happened when you said them Like the *All for Jesus* of student days, they shifted the emphasis.

She looked over the dining-saloon, putting people into her new picture. The passengers were now her potential patients and she felt the pull of their worldliness as she realized that she might have met and known many of them in her father's drawing-room A moment later, when they left the dining-saloon, she caught the eye of an army officer as she passed his table. Had she been looking down as she should have been, she would not have seen his frank glance of admiration.

She was praying before she reached her cabin "Blessed Lord, You know that I would flee the convent tomorrow if I thought that this lingering worldliness would stamp me always Dear God, they are the most unhappy of Your servants, those half caught, half given. You have taken away the bush station and put me back in the world; put into me as well the strength to ignore its temptations. . . ."

THEY DEBARKED at Lobito in the Portuguese Congo and took the train from there to Katanga Province in the Belgian Congo—a colony eighty times the size of Belgium.

The stucco station appeared quite suddenly out of the Congo night. Sister Luke stood with Sister Augustine at the train window that had three days of dust piled in its corners. The platform was full of cotton-clad natives cheering and waving. She saw necklaces strung with teeth, oiled hair twisted into tufts, and bared chests scarred darkly with tattoo incisions A black-faced band in red tarbooshes and khaki shorts marched in, blaring the *Brabançonne*. This was her destination. the copper capital of the upper Katanga. The moment the national anthem ended, their carriage door was snatched open. A wiry Negro in makeshift uniform cried "Mama Augustine!" and helped them both from the compartment, lifting up their skirts from the rear as if he too had read their Rule. This was Kalulu, the convent factotum, the Congoese version of the genteel old ladies who lived like swallows in the crannies of every convent and chaperoned nuns in the homeland. Sister Luke smelled the Congo night as soon as she stepped on the platform The jacaranda trees were in bloom.



Two coifs came towards her through the crowd The face of her new Superior was peaceful, joyous and positive. She looks too gentle to be a Superior, Sister Luke thought Then she felt the firm Flemish cheek laid against hers.

Mother Mathilde allowed no traditional bows in this public place She said, "We are so glad you have come," and led the way to the convent Ford. As the car started, she reached over and took the hand of her new nun in hers. Like the Reverend Mother Emmanuel, here was one who could venture the human touch, Sister Luke thought.

The night widened under a canopy of stars she felt she could almost touch. The city she had dreaded petered out quickly and there seemed to be nothing ahead except an immense darkness smelling of dust and



mimosas. Now and again she heard the shrill song of cicadas and a faint staccato sound which she realized with quickened emotion was drum talk. Then the familiar music of a chapel bell chimed through the Congo night

THE CLOISTER was not like anything she had imagined. It was a brick bungalow which opened directly on to a wide dusty street. Behind it was a small garden, where the recreations were held; and beyond were the rustic chapel and the refectory. All the buildings had galvanized iron roofs lined on the inside with wood, with enough space between to accommodate lizards and snakes which occasionally dropped through the knot-holes.

On one side of the convent stood the big modern government hospital, and on the other boarding- and day-schools, and an immense nursery. Less than twenty nuns ran these establishments.

The first morning she saw her sisters lined up for showers, she thought she was looking at Siamese cats. The parts of their faces normally covered by headbands were creamy white and all the rest was burned to a dark mask by the African sun.

The next unexpected sight was of a single black, male face, peering into the refectory from a serving window. Never before had she known a man to look upon nuns at their meals. André, the cook, not only looked, but weighed and judged as well, and ordered the best servings for his favourites Each morning he set a little bunch of marguerites in a tumbler at Mother Mathilde's place The Superior dared not order it removed for austerity's sake, for fear of hurting his feelings.

The black boys who replaced the pot-washer, cooking and laundry nuns back home taught her about the community even before she learned the names of her sisters If a sister with a passion for cleanliness humiliated André by handing back a fork that looked unclean, she paid for her forgetfulness of native prestige for as much as a week thereafter. André would set her place without a fork, knowing she could ask for nothing at the refectory table but must wait until some sister observed her lack and asked for her

Or, you could read reproach in the form of a ball made of dust, insect wings and the fuzzy drift from trees, named curiously a pussy-cat, placed beneath the bed of a nun who had spoken sharply to the cleaning boy.

The nun concerned never took it lightly "Something I said or did to him," she would say thoughtfully. "I offended his prestige somewhere, somehow . . ."

The black boys were everywhere, trained by the sisters to assist them. Many had gone to the missionary schools, Catholic and Protestant, which were peppered all through the Congo. They worked as clerks, baby-sitters and practical nurses and, like the selected few who worked inside the convent, they worked best for the sisters they liked.

Sister Luke was keenly aware of their black eyes upon her. She did not know that already a favourable report had passed over the Congoese grapevine. "Talks little. Looks much," Kalulu had broadcast. "Held hands with Big Mama Mathilde on way back to sister house, therefore

esteemed. Said thank you in our tongue when I helped from car." Boula the laundry boy had added to the publicity the number he found stamped on her gimps, which was the same as that of Mama Marie-Polycarpe who used to bring back news of their villages.

The barefoot hospital boys were as deft as women at bedmaking and bandage rolling They prepared her somewhat for the Congoese assistants in surgery and for the skilled laboratory technicians with whom she took a refresher course in tropical medicine. These were the end results of a medical education that was going to produce full-fledged Negro doctors within the next few years.

The African bush came closer when she saw what it could do to the white man. After her refresher course, she took up her post as chief nurse in the hospital staffed by her nursing sisters The bacteria she had studied were now visible in their human hosts in the forms of fevers and ulcerating sores. In the emergency ward she looked at scalps torn by wild beasts, at hands and feet gangrenous with thorn wounds, and she had no feeling that she was confined within four walls of a city hospital.

The doctor was also a new experience Chief surgeon, obstetrician, tuberculosis, cancer and malaria expert, Dr. Fortunati was a witch-doctor in the eyes of the black nurses, a Beelzebub in the eyes of the other nuns and a genius in hers. Sister Luke examined his post-operatives. He had to have God on his side to have pulled through some of the cases she charted. She longed to see him operate and in due time the opportunity came. A theatre Sister fell ill and Mother Mathilde asked her to take on the additional job temporarily. "You must always leave the theatre the moment operations are over," said the Superior. "Don't ever linger to discuss a case. He is an ace, as you know, but he is also a man, a bachelor and an agnostic. An Italian with hot blood." Her gentle face, so pure in its goodness, turned momentarily worldly. "Don't ever think, Sister, that your habit will protect you." She traced a firm sign of the cross on Sister Luke's forehead before sending her forth to the man who was to become a dominant influence in her cloistered life

In the beginning she knew him mainly as a pair of bloodshot eyes in a sallow masked face and as the source of a penetrating garlic odour. The garlic mixed with the ether she administered in the dark dawns on a fasting stomach before Mass She fought her nausea while he fought for the life on the table

For the first few weeks pride supported her. She could look round the theatre and see it performing like a precision ballet. She had already improved on the training of the native assistants. The boy who swabbed the doctor's forehead with a piece of ice wrapped in gauze took cues from her nods. Another boy had replaced the usual instrument nun. When a doctor from the copper mines assisted, she had a boy trained to help him

But one morning Dr Fortunati asked her to assist. Then she was directly opposite him across the table, her head bent close to his. The cold sweat of nausea broke out on her forehead and she knew why so many theatre Sisters had been defeated after a term of assisting this garlic-eating genius. But not I, she promised herself angrily.

When the operation was over, the doctor complimented her and asked how her health was since she had taken over the double duties

"I can continue, *Monsieur le Docteur*, until the replacement arrives from the mother house. But on one condition only."

"Which is, Reverend Sister?"

"That you promise not to eat garlic on the nights before you operate."

It was the only time she ever heard him laugh. She backed away as she saw his gloved hands reaching out as if to take her by the shoulders to shake her, his laughter pealing through the theatre, youthful and fresh like a small boy's. As she hurried towards the door, she heard him saying, "For *you*, Reverend Sister, I agree . . ."

He kept his word. She began to assist him regularly, rising at four on the mornings when two operations were scheduled, because after seven o'clock the theatre was as hot and humid as a Turkish bath. Her chief boy, Emil, accompanied each stretcher to the theatre and recited the vital statistics of the cases his assistants lifted upon the table "All pre-op medication given, Mama Luke All lab work done and okay. No temperature No apprehension No dental plates. Blood pressure one forty over seventy"

As Dr. Fortunati operated, he taught her, taking her step by step through each technique as he cut, clamped and stitched Very often they were in the midst of an operation when the chapel bells rang for six-o'clock Mass But she went straight on with him, knowing that in time the Father would come to the hospital with Communion for the patients The black altar boy holding the candle and bell would stop

first outside the theatre door. At the sound of the chimes an assistant would remove her mask and swing open the door so she could pass through without touching. She would kneel, receive the Host and be back at the operating-table in a matter of seconds.

The doctor never looked at her then. These were the only times he made no sardonic comment on the religious life.

He called her for every emergency. He sent Emil to fetch her out of chapel when he could not find her in the hospital. She knew that in time her sisters would comment, since more than half were professors with little understanding of medical crises. Once when she thought the matter could have waited five minutes to permit her to finish an Office with the sisterhood, she mentioned the fact. Dr. Fortunati turned on her sharply. "*You* may be in a convent but I am not," he said. "The government doesn't pay you to pray but to assist me." His eyes were bloodshot and weary after a week-end party. "If your Superior allows you to do the work of two, it means that you have to give twice the time to the hospital, and it means one less at prayers."

She knew he was right, and she reported his rebuke to her Superior. Mother Mathilde was a nurse herself. It was not difficult to make her understand the problems of nun versus nurse.

She watched Mother Mathilde composing her thoughts. Presently her Superior said: "For the moment, Sister, you can only ask God to inspire you to act rightly. I have written again to the mother house begging another nurse, for you cannot hold those two jobs indefinitely. My concern is not only for your health but for what may be happening to your spiritual life, my sister."

Mother Mathilde leaned forward slightly, detaching herself as it were from the crucifix hanging above her chair. Her gentle face was that of a friend, very human and warm "Momentarily, I have permitted a situation which forces you to starve your spiritual life. You starve it with a prayer snatched here and there, with a meditation shortened, with a rosary said between pavilions" She smiled ruefully. "It is not easy, Sister, to serve God and Dr. Fortunati simultaneously"

This was the very problem that had brought her to Mother Mathilde, but now Sister Luke saw the challenge in the situation. I'm strong, she thought, I can live on snatched prayers and curtailed meditations. I can manage.

"With God's graces, I can carry on without risk, *ma Mère.*"

Mother Mathilde looked at her with a smile of ineffable trust. "Remember, Sister, your soul was put in my care. Any risk to it in this trying situation is mine as well as yours."

Sister Luke returned to the hospital filled with inner excitement. She had never before felt so close to a Superior. "Mine as well as yours . . . ." Mother Mathilde shared the risk. *The risk of me,* Sister Luke thought with emotion.

Suddenly she saw the dimensions of that risk. Her love of the medical practice could become an attachment very difficult for her conscience to cope with. And, when the doctor sent for her, was there not sometimes a secret sweet satisfaction in being singled out after all the years of struggling to pass unperceived? She crossed the foyer on the way to the wards and another aspect of that risk was there before her eyes Two wives of her colonial patients were waiting to tell her their sides of the stories she had already heard from their husbands babbling in fever.

As chief nurse of the hospital, she was frequently exposed to worldly affairs about which a nun was supposed to know nothing. Yet she had discovered, as she gave sympathy and advice, that she knew enough about such things to be able, quite often, to win a dying man away from them and back to his Creator. But how often, when she had secured permission from some godless old colonial to call a priest for absolution, had she remembered to say, *Someone else's prayers achieved this, I am only an instrument?*

The risk of me, she thought again and her self-confidence turned to dismay. She stepped into the dispensary to be alone. *Blessed Lord, help me to be everything she trusts me to be. . . .*

The dispensary door opened. "Mama Luke . . ." Emil, her chief boy, signalled emergency. She made her heart keep in step with her unhurried walk instead of running ahead as it usually did when Dr. Fortunati called from the theatre.

But the table was empty and the operating lamp not lit The doctor smiled and asked her if she could do without him for a three-day weekend while he went up to the Kivu to fish "There's nothing risky round here at the moment," he said. "You'll have lots of time to catch up on your prayers while I'm gone."

"And if an emergency does come up, what then?"

"Get a medic from the mines," he said easily. He looked at her standing quietly before him with hands folded beneath her scapular. "And get a bit of rest yourself, Sister. I've used you pretty hard in recent months."

She stayed in the theatre after he had gone, checking over the things she would have time to do while he was away. I'll live my full religious life as well, she promised herself.

The telephone buzzed. It was Sister Aurélie from the men's pavilion advising that a cancer case was failing fast

"I'll get a Father over at once."

She rang the brotherhood that was just a few blocks away and smiled with relief when she heard Father André's voice He was her great friend and spiritual adviser as well, and universally loved in the colony.

"Just give me time to get the old Ford cranked, Sister. Wait for me by the main door."

Expecting the rattle of the brotherhood's Ford, she did not recognize Father André when he appeared round the street corner. She gazed at the four men bearing a chair on their shoulders and at the priest slumped sideways in it, seeming to doze. You often saw exhausted missionary Fathers returning like that from a long tour of the bush, looking like apostolic statues with long beards—all the Congo Fathers wore them because the natives, who had seen God only in holy pictures, expected anyone coming in His name to look like Him. Then she realized that the four men bearing the chair were shaven-headed brothers of Father André's Order.

She hurried forward as they turned in at the hospital gate. A brother said, "He left his Ford in gear when he cranked . . . smashed him against a stone wall." Her shocked glance took in the leg hanging askew, the blood-drenched white cotton trousers. She gave orders as she led the way to the treatment-room. Emil sped to get Mother Mathilde Sister Aurélie telephoned to summon another priest for the dying patient and a doctor from the mines.

She had the white cotton trousers slit and sterile compresses applied when Emil reappeared with the Superior. Mother Mathilde gave her the comprehending glance of nurse to nurse and rolled up her long white sleeves. Sister Aurélie came in, reported calmly that there wasn't a doctor

to be found at the mines or in the town and took her place at the operating-table.

The three nuns worked like a single being with six hands, preparing transfusion and anæsthetic. Father André came out of his swoon and said he wished to confess himself before they gave him any narcotics. Then the three brothers at the head of the table prayed for the spotless soul of Father André while the nuns at the foot worked over the difficult transfusion with double syringe and laid bare the torn flesh. There was no praying at their end of the table: they were all nurses then, swift, and expert. Father André confessed himself humbly in the presence of everyone. As only the very great and simple souls can do, Sister Luke thought, and nodded to Mother Mathilde to start the narcotics.

All her theatre boys came round her as she prepared to reduce the fracture and go into the wound. She had sent no one to call, but they were there with sterile gowns and gloves but no masks. They knew the nuns would have no time to remove the coifs and put on the nursing veils over which masks could be worn. Silent, efficient, they shook out the gowns and dressed her and Sister Aurélie, snapped open the gloves and pulled them on their upraised hands.

One of the boys began to break the tubes containing sterile catgut, as if he knew she was going to suture. She was sure it was a case for amputation only, but something drove her on to do the best she could to save the leg. Mother Mathilde ran the slow narcosis, watched heartbeat and called out the numbers of the sutures needed.

I stitch, she snips, she watches and calls, and here are the three of us nuns turned totally nurses for this hour—and what was that risk I was pondering this morning? Was it not for a performance such as this that we were trained and moulded, every whit as much as for staying close to walls in wide places and never running, always walking, never frowning, always smiling?

Presently they began laying back the ribbons of skin. A boy had the gutter mould ready. They lifted the leg into it Then they laid dressings carefully over the best that they could do without amputation and Sister Luke caught Mother Mathilde's eyes upon her when she looked up to see how the intravenous was running.

THREE DAYS later she saw the same look in Dr. Fortunati's eyes when

he examined her handiwork. It was a glance of pure professional admiration.

"I did what I could," she said, "what the grace of God told me to do . . . but I couldn't amputate as indicated, being only a nurse." She heard herself saying I, I . . . and flushed. "Mother Mathilde and Sister Aurélie assisted me."

She staggered a little as she helped him change the dressing. With Mother Mathilde's permission, she had sat up for three nights with Father André, listening to him wander in fever.

"Nothing more could have been done, Sister." The doctor straightened up with a satisfied sigh. "It might take a year . . but he'll walk again."

She stiffened before the rush of pride his words gave her, then reminded herself promptly that she was "only an instrument," as the Reverend Mother Emmanuel had told her.

CHAPTER 5

THE CHANGING colours of the altar cloths, from the violet of Advent through the whites and golds of Christmas and on to the purples of Lent, told of the passing year.

Or, to mark the seasons, there were the four letters she was permitted to write annually to her family, of four pages each and not a sentence more so that she shrunk her bold square handwriting down to spidery lace and saw herself finally writing just like all the other missionary sisters

And, every so often, Mother Mathilde reported that she had written to the mother house for the nursing reinforcement that never came.

Afterwards, when Sister Luke looked back on her first Congo year, she saw but one really important experience in it. God caught up with her and gave her one more chance to recite her vows without reservation. Then, when she was safely in His pocket, He let her see with shattering clarity how little humility she had.

Twice weekly, when she went to the native hospital to take lumbar punctures, a serving boy showed his liking for her by waiting at the clinic door with a bowl of iced fruit, usually mangoes The chilly golden flesh of the mangoes was delicious in the humid forenoons; but one day she collapsed in the theatre with a fulminant type of dysentery.

They carried her to the convent infirmary. In a haze of pain she swallowed what the doctor ordered and felt the needle-prick of his opium injections. The black face of Emil, the doctor's yellow face and the delicate ovals of Mother Mathilde's and Sister Aurélie's hung alternately over her until late one night when she heard Mother Mathilde tell the doctor she would summon priest and sisters.

She was floating above the bed, looking down on a young nun dying there, when she heard the sisters at three o'clock in the morning coming along the path from dormitory to infirmary, singing the *Miserere* softly in the cricket-shrill African night She saw all twenty sisters with lighted candles in their hands and old Father Stephen at the end of the procession carrying the Viaticum, with Mother Mathilde and her senior nun beside him with the holy oils.

You die so beautifully when you are a nun, she thought. All this for me. And even more. Next day a cable would inform the mother house of her death and, shortly after, every convent in the entire congregation would make the Stations of the Cross in her name. She saw the processionals winding through all the European houses, on to the Orient and back again through India and the Congo . . . ah, those beautiful processionals that had always caught her by the throat . . . .

There was a smile on her lips when Father Stephen entered her room, raised the Viaticum and intoned the opening phrase of extreme unction: "Peace to this house . . . ."

"And to all who live herein," responded her sisters, holding their little candles before their faces . . .

But she recovered. She knew why, even before she returned to the community. One by one during the weeks she lay in the hospital, her conscience turned up the humiliating truths of her illness. Her entire preparation to die had been an indulgence in heroism and self-pity The smile the sisters had seen and called courageous had been for gratification at the thought of a thousand nuns circling the globe in a memorial procession in her name. Had there been a single moment, even in that most solemn ceremony of last rites, when her heart had been truly humbled and every thought bent directly towards God? She shrank with shame when her sisters openly congratulated her on her courage before death

"Sister Luke didn't die," Mother Mathilde said quietly, "because her

mission is not yet accomplished. Moreover, my sisters, it was not she who was tested, but us, the community." She nodded emphatically. "Ah yes, God was testing us to see if we were willing to give up a number. One number less in our understaffed community would have been a heavy cross for us to bear at this time."

Not one nun with a known name and background less—just one number less Sister Luke looked at her Superior, who never forgot first principles of the religious life Be nothing before you can be something. . . .

Soon after she returned to work she trained her dressing boys for greater responsibilities, and made Emil her deputy. Both innovations brought the spotlight of "singularity" upon her.

The chief in charge of nursing in the hospital had always had a nun as deputy. But why a nun? Why not, she asked herself, old black Emil, who knows as much about nursing as any of us?

"I'd like to make him my deputy," she informed Mother Mathilde. "Then we can free Sister Aurélie for full time in the maternity pavilion."

Sister Luke felt the probe of the Superior's bright eyes Desire for change, merely for the sake of doing something different, was one of the big temptations of every nun.

But at last Mother Mathilde said, "Very well. And I myself will inform the doctor, who could have no objections, as far as I can see."

Sister Luke returned to the hospital to hand over to a black man a responsibility nearly equal to her own She called together all her registered male nurses and technicians and all her messengers, cleaning boys and kitchen staff. She told them that from that day forward Emil was to be their Capita

"When you have some problem, you will now tell it to Emil, your Capita," she said. "He will tell me. I will consult with Big Mama Mathilde and she, in turn, will ask God for guidance."

Their faces beamed. They saw their troubles, translated by Emil for white understanding, going straight up the line to God and back again, justly decided.

"Also," said Sister Luke, "there will be no more punishment ordered by the sisters. Your Capita will henceforth decide each case and himself decree the punishment." This made an even greater impression. Ripples of approval passed through the room when she finished speaking.

She would never have known that her name and the news of her prestige-giving promotion of Emil started on its way to the bush that same night, had not one of her sisters been able to read the drums. In the recreation pavilion as she sat under the electric light, dodging bats and fanning off winged ants, she heard a visiting sister from the Kipushi bush station compliment Mother Mathilde for something having to do with the hospital administration.

"And who, may I ask, is Mama Luke?" said the visiting sister, looking round the circle while the drums talked softly from the native town.

EMIL became her shadow. When she asked for extra night duty, he took it also. When she went across town to the native hospital, he rode with her. From him she learned much about the Congo and its twelve million blacks, of whom the majority were Bantus like himself. Emil told her of the rivers and of the spirits inhabiting their whirlpools, of the rain forests and the mountains where the great baboons lived.

She in turn told him whatever he wished to know about her own people. The "white mamas" puzzled him, he confessed. Where were their husbands?

When she tried to explain, she discovered how incomprehensible to the bush native was the idea of chastity. Even to Emil, the concept of a mystic marriage was impossible to explain without getting into the subject of polygamy—as had happened to one of the nuns who had tried to make the seemingly solitary situation of so many white sisters understandable to a Negro with five wives. Eventually, Sister Luke solved the dilemma by telling Emil that indeed she had a husband who was in Heaven, and that she had made Him a promise never to marry again. Emil understood promise. He understood widow. Grave with sympathy, he nodded and never spoke of it again.

It was Emil who helped her work out her plan to give specialized training to some of her male nurses. *Instruct to capacity* was the watchword of the Europeans in the Congo in the 1930's: pushing, encouraging, putting into the natives as much knowledge as they could absorb. One day, Sister Luke summoned her four brightest hospital boys to a conference.

When you had something to tell or show to the natives, you always made a little drama. The boys came into the dressing-room and saw

Emil lying on the table heavily bandaged. Sister Luke waited until their startled chatter died down; then she told them that this was Monsieur X just recovering from a hernia operation.

"I am going to teach you to change his dressings," she said. "This is practice, but the day will come when you four will be entrusted with the change of dressings of all our male patients."

She felt them draw back instinctively. No black man, no matter how skilled, ever touched the wound of a white man. It made no sense when you recalled that many of the younger patients had grown up in the Congo with black-boy guardians who had removed chiggers from under their toe-nails and had patted mud on their scratches.

"We do everything with forceps," she said. She picked up a pair of forceps from the dressing-trolley. "Never touch a patient Never touch a dressing, even with sterile gloves" She began lifting in slow motion the first layer of dressings. The boys drew closer to the table.

For a week she and Emil trained them in secret. Then one morning, sterile-gowned and gloved, they preceded her with the dressing-trolley to the men's pavilion.

They were practical nurses with four years' schooling; they knew every white man lying in the rooms but they went to pieces outside the door where Sister Luke flagged them to a stop. Fear of this new thing made their faces go grey. There was a quick chatter of Kiswahili among them, as of birds warning each other.

Sister Luke called their names sternly: "Mafuta, the sterile towels. Banza, the kidney basin. Edouard and Illunga . . forceps." She did not tell them that she had prepared the patient, an easy-going colonial, for this innovation. She nodded for them to put everything back on the trolley. "Now we are ready," she said, giving her boys a smile of trust before leading the way into the room

Within a fortnight she had a production-line system of dressing changes which enabled her to dress twenty-five post-operatives in an hour. When he saw the dressing boys in action, Dr. Fortunati looked from them to her with something of the same expression he had had when he inspected Father André's leg.

Perhaps if he had not bragged to the mine doctors of how efficiently things were running in *his* hospital, there would have been no spotlight on Sister Luke, but news of a nun who had a trained circus of dressing

boys got round. The Apostolic Delegate of the province telephoned Mother Mathilde to inform her that one of her nuns was being mentioned by name in public places.

Sister Luke knew when Mother Mathilde came to the men's pavilion to watch her dressing boys in action that it was for a reason other than routine inspection. The boys thought she had come to admire them and performed beautifully. They all stepped back like soldiers when Edouard came to the removal of the final collodion gauze. Emil summoned Sister Luke to the bedside with a glance.

"What teamwork, *Révérende Mère,*" said the patient. He turned his head on the pillow and smiled at Mother Mathilde.

Sister Luke lifted the gauze and inspected the clamps on the incision. Ordinarily she would have told the boys why they were not yet ready for removal, but she dared not trust her voice. Like her heart, it would tremble with the awareness she had plucked from the air when she stood by Mother Mathilde.

If I have failed *her*, Sister Luke thought. O God, let it be anyone else, but not her . . . not her. She signed to Mafuta for a clean collodion gauze, laid it on the wound and stepped back. The boys moved in to complete the dressing.

"I must go now, Monsieur," said Mother Mathilde. "I leave you indeed in capable hands."

Sister Luke accompanied her to the door of the pavilion. The Superior paused in an alcove apart from the traffic of the corridor. No nun ever rebuked another in the presence of others.

"Your only fault, Sister," she said softly, "was in failing to tell me about this in advance. I see now that this work would have been noted and acclaimed no matter which sister inspired it. But earlier, when our Delegate telephoned me to ask why one of my nuns sought to singularize herself, I had no answer."

"I should have told you, *ma Mère,*" Sister Luke whispered, trembling. "I think perhaps I wanted to surprise you . . . ." She stopped before her voice would break.

"I have my answer now, Sister," said Mother Mathilde very firmly and loyally. "I shall even invite our Delegate to come and see how we make both ends meet, lacking sufficient nursing sisters." Her parting smile made it all seem a very small matter.

But it was not a small matter, not when you were a nun. Though but a sin of omission, the most forgivable, you had to put it into the context of your religious life.

The more inner failures of obedience, of humility she put into the context, the more depressed she became. The doctor was the first to see a change in her. One morning after operations, he gave her a print of the final X-ray of Father André's leg for a keepsake.

"To remind you always," he said, "that you are an excellent nurse." He watched her slip the print without comment into her pocket.

Then he said, "But do you know something, Sister? You're much too disciplined a person. Recently, I've watched you fold in upon yourself, and I cannot think why. What is it, Sister?"

Caught off guard, she flushed That this irreligious layman had guessed her inner struggle nearly brought tears. She turned quickly and left the theatre, but his sharp face grown suddenly sympathetic was difficult to banish from her thoughts. She stood for a moment in the corridor, filled with emotion, then duty came towards her in the form of Father Vermeuhlen, the famous priest of the leper colony.

FATHER VERMEUHLEN looked like one of the elder apostles walking down the corridor. She knew instantly why every bush native fell to his knees at his approach.

He was a giant of a man, dressed in white cotton soutane, an immense sun topi and heavy high-laced boots. A snowy beard fell far down over his broad chest, and his eyebrows, arching thickly over his beautiful and kindly eyes, were black.

"Father Vermeuhlen, you are expected," she said.

"I've been hearing about you, Sister Luke." His dark eyes twinkled. "The drums, Sister."

She walked with him to the laboratory to start the tests which would take two weeks to complete Father Vermeuhlen lived alone in a far bush village, caring for the bodies as well as for the souls of his miserable black lepers. More than a hundred of them, the doctor had told her, most of them in the advanced stage when even their own tribes throw them out to die. He had also told her Father Vermeuhlen's story.

Many years ago one of the Fathers had made a tour of the jungle on an apostolic mission. In a certain village he found a lone white man, of

about forty, who was playing with some Bantu children and seemed to be alone with the tribe. The white man came towards the priest with love and a sort of apprehension in his eyes. He said that he also had once been a priest, that he had come out to the Congo in the early days before there were roads and telephones and had been completely isolated. After two years of terrible loneliness, he despaired. He walked off into the bush one day and made no further effort to communicate with his distant mission, which eventually gave him up as lost. Whether out of pity, or loneliness, or love, he lived with a native woman and had three children by her.

Nobody knew what the Father said to him, but a few weeks later the ex-priest appeared at one of the bush missions and left three children there to be cared for and educated by the nuns. Then he disappeared.

Months later the bush hummed with the news that the white man was back from Rome and that he was a priest again. Apparently he had asked for permission to devote the rest of his life to lepers as penance for his sins.

Sister Luke said a little prayer as she made his smears Some souls like Father Vermeuhlen, she reflected, had just one colossal failure in obedience, and then ever after the simple one-way road of penance, instead of her tortuous path of many small failings.

When he was gone she sat staring at his charts. All negative. The first entries were almost illegible with age. This was expiation on the grand scale.

She was unaware that the doctor stood before her desk until he made the little *Psst* sound used by nuns to attract each other's attention.

"You can enter Father Vermeuhlen's physical," he said. "Still negative. It's a miracle." She couldn't conceal her rush of relief and saw the sardonic look that always came over his face when he considered the religious life. "I suppose, Sister, that such total and utterly insane sacrifice makes complete sense to you."

"Yes, it does, Doctor," she said quietly. "I envy him. God must love him greatly. . . ."

TWICE YEARLY Father Vermeuhlen came in for the leprosy check. In the months between visits, Sister Luke often thought about him. He seemed to be the happiest soul she had encountered in the religious life

and certainly the kindest man she had ever known. Once he said to her, "Kindness resembles God the closest and disarms man the quickest." and, although he was explaining why nothing ever happened to him when he visited unfriendly tribes to gather in lepers, she knew that he was telling her his credo.

In roundabout, discreet ways, Sister Luke discussed her perplexities with Father Vermeuhlen. His comment, simple and consoling, was always the same: "We are His children, vowed or otherwise. He lets happen to us what must happen for our own good . . ."

Three times she filed away the Father's clinical record with all tests marked negative. Though nuns were not permitted to keep diaries, this was a diary of sorts.

In 1934, she talked with the Father about apes. She was then making occasional inspection trips that passed through the ape country where even Emil shook with fright. She told Father Vermeuhlen about old Sister Eucharistia, who always made the driver lift his cap to the apes and say, *"Yambo*—good day!" because the old nun believed she must educate the natives away from superstition. And the black boys always fell ill after greeting the apes—peculiar maladies with fevers and coughs. "But of course," Father Vermeuhlen had said then.

And now in March 1935, the Father arrived again with the last downpours of the summer rains.

"Father André is back," she said in greeting. "He made a trip to Kenya and caught yaws. He'll probably accept treatment now because you're here to play draughts with him."

"What have I always told you, Sister?" Father Vermeuhlen's smile lifted his beard at the corners. *"He lets happen to us,"* he intoned, *"what must happen* . . . in this case, for *my* own good!" His beard waggled with his muscular laughter. "My old draughts partner back again. May God forgive me for my gratitude."

With a nauseous bland acacia drink ready in her hand for Father André, she watched them play for a while that afternoon. They played draughts like the Arabs in the market place, crouched and cowled, seething with rivalry that made the air crackle between them as outside it crackled between each lightning flash.

Emil appeared with bulging eyes on a burst of thunder. "Mama Luke! Ambulance call. Three men drowning in a flash flood . . . ."

With the same hand that had moved him into the king's row, Father André swept the draughts off the board on to his bed. "You'll want a priest, Sister." He looked up at his draughts partner, who was already on his feet. "I'll send a lay brother after you with the Viaticum, just in case."

Down, press, release, *up* . . . she rehearsed the tempo of artificial respiration as she swept past the desk. "Tell Mother Mathilde, please," she said to Sister Aurélie. She misread her sister's warning glance. It seemed to be saying, *Be careful.* Be careful when there were lives to be saved if you got there quickly enough?

The ambulance rocked her from wall to wall but Father Vermeuhlen sat firm as a mountain. He moved the ribbon markers of his missal to the section of the sacraments.

Emil stuttered what news the police chief had given. Three young Italians from the mines had gone duck shooting. The flash flood coming unseen through the reeds had overturned their raft, swept it away and left them wading to the sand bar midstream in heavy rubber hip boots which kept sinking, sinking, because all those sand bars were quicksand. . . . Father Vermeuhlen moved his markers back a few pages to where she knew were the prayers for souls in agony who had only a few moments left.

The duck shooters looked at first like busts built upon sands. They were screaming as they clawed with despair towards the people trying in vain to reach them with ropes that blew away, forcing themselves deeper with each frenzied struggle. Suddenly they saw Father Vermeuhlen make the sign of the cross over the separating waters. Their mad eyes fastened on the priest already lost in the prayers of general absolution.

The mud was above the hunters' shoulders when Father Vermeuhlen lifted his great voice like a bronze gong above the storm *Leave this world, Christian souls, in the name of the all-powerful Father who created you . . . .*

The mud pushed up against their chins. She shut her eyes. The gong-like voice tolled steadily on to the last great pleadings . . . *Have pity on their tremblings, have pity on their tears* . .

A whistling intake of breath around her told her that it was over. She opened her eyes. The sand bar was as smooth as water-marked silk.

Afterwards, she remembered the three faces of living death and the whine of the wind in the reeds. She could pick up her own activities only after she returned to the convent. She went at once to her Superior to receive the benediction of return and to give her report. Mother Mathilde received her with coolness. "I know the story, Sister Luke," she said in a voice oddly constrained. "I've been on the telephone for the past hour with the police, the Italian consul, even the newspaper. What I should like you to explain now is why you left the convent without my permission."

"But *ma Mère!* I delegated Sister Aurélie to tell you!"

The moment she said *I delegated* she knew what she had done. She had presumed permission to leave, which was the same as leaving without permission. You had no alibi for this. The city around you could blow up and burn down. But you never stepped beyond your convent walls until your Superior gave you the benediction of departure and said, "Go. . . ." *Obedience, O my God, failing at this late date . . . .*

When it was over, she went to the chapel to make herself calm. There were no tears now; just an overwhelming sense of failure. A tarantula, black and hairy, crouched on the altar steps. She stared at it and thought: *Jump, and I won't move.*

After a while she was able to talk to God. "Why do You humiliate me again? Why didn't You give me the grace of second thought? Why? *Why?* You let me believe my intentions were selfless when I ran off . . . and then You gave me the heartbreak of Mother Mathilde's face. . . ."

The tarantula seemed to be watching her. "Why don't You make him jump at me?" she asked. "Or have You some other design for one so imperfect as I? *O my God, I am truly sorry that I have offended . . . .*"

When she emerged, the afternoon sun blazed from a cloudless sky. She walked slowly towards the hospital. Sister Aurélie swung the log-book round for her.

"On your way back to Maternity, Sister Aurélie, will you tell Illunga there's a big tarantula in the chapel? It might frighten some of our sisters." She signed in the log her return to duty. "I'll be in the lab if anyone needs me," she said.

The laboratory was dense with heat and very quiet. She took the slides of Father Vermeuhlen's nasal smears, set her microscope to the

high power and slipped in the first slide. Negative, she said softly, as she marked the slide and racked it. She slipped the second into place and bent her head over the eyepiece.

The mycobacterium lay like a stick of driftwood on the surface of the deep-sea film. A cry escaped her as she stared. Her hand shook. I could be wrong, she thought, I've *got* to be wrong.

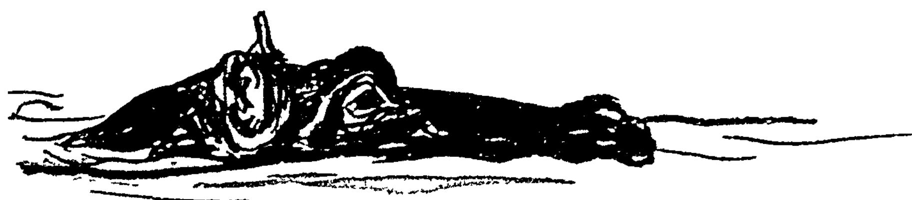
She turned to sharper focus and brought up the enclosing capsule like a shadow—the identifying feature of the leprosy organism. Beneath it, she found three more. My God, she whispered, *how can You justify* . . . . Then, very clearly, as if he were standing beside her, she heard Father Vermeuhlen saying, *"He lets happen what must happen for our own good."* And that, she knew, was exactly what he would say again, with perfect faith and trust, when she would tell him the results of the test.

Tears stung her eyes. The small deadly shapes blurred on the field. Presently she heard the call to serenity of the Angelus bells.

A YEAR passed and they were in Lent again. The exhaustion of the Congo summer was written on every face, clearest of all on those of the nursing nuns, who, owing to the fact that the Order had opened a new house in Ceylon, were still too few.

In the months of the worst heat, Mother Mathilde had regularly selected one of them to accompany her on her travels—in itself a sign of anxiety for their well-being. Twice during the year Sister Luke travelled with her to remote missions, and saw the Africa of her dreams. Both times they went part of the way by pirogues down misty rivers banked by dense forests looped with lianas. The black boys who poled them along sang with a strange repetitive rhythm and Mother Mathilde stood often at the prow, gazing raptly forward at each ravishing Eden the winding river disclosed. She sighed like a child when they tied up at their destinations, and once she said endearingly, "I can never bear to have it end."

Sister Luke relived her outings for weeks after. She was at last a choir nun and she practised breath control for the Easter service under the purple skies of the Congo Lent, while the rains poured down with press-button timing, from ten to eleven every morning and from three to five every afternoon. She imagined herself then in the bush, where she still



hoped to be sent, with a small band of black boys listening to her high chanting and reproducing it perfectly right after her.

Sometimes, when she sang with the choir, she felt an impatience with the Cantatrice for not urging the nuns to give their all to the final *Christ is risen* Then she would think, I know nothing at all about this ancient music; why do I feel so judgmental?

She had the impression that her whole psychology had changed. Her emotions flared over small things Once, when she was having late breakfast alone after two operations, her coffee bowl had slipped, splashing brown over her white habit, and she had dropped her face in her hands and wept uncontrollably.

Had it ever occurred to her that her iron constitution could break down, she would have known at once the cause of her psychological change. Afterwards, she wondered how she had missed every warning signal until the frightful death of one of her dressing boys somehow brought the picture into focus.

CHAPTER 6

IT HAPPENED on a day when everything went wrong. The doctor lost a life on the operating-table at five in the morning—a defeat for both herself and him. Then Emil reported that one of the boys, Banza, had come to work too drunk to stand She telephoned to Monsieur Marcel, chief of the *Force Publique,* who always pulled her out of these dilemmas. The town jail, he told her, was filled to the last cell.

"Get Emil to find a corner in the grounds, if your prisoners' pavilion is full," he said. "The boy will sleep it off in twenty-four hours."

She told Emil to find a place, and after that she forgot about Banza. She had three deliveries in Maternity, two typhoid cases in Contagious; and the general ward, which registered a humid hundred and twelve degrees, was filled to the last bed with enough malaria cases to shake the walls when the chills came on.

Once or twice Emil went to look at Banza and reported that he snored in stupor like an animal and ought to have twenty lashes to make him remember that he was a man.

"Wait until morning, Emil," she said "Find out the reasons first, then decide punishment."

The next morning Emil was waiting for her outside the chapel. His face was ash-grey.

"Mama, come see . . . ." He choked, unable to go on. Hurrying with him across the garden, she tried to find out what had happened. "Mama see . . . Mama see . . . ." He chattered in the fluty voice of fear, first in French, then in Kiswahili He led the way to a tool-shed behind the hospital, flung open the door and pointed.

There on the dirt floor was a man-shaped mound of carnivorous white ants that had eaten Banza clean to the skeleton. Frozen with horror, she stared. She never knew how she got back to the hospital.

The police chief asked twice who was speaking. Then he wanted some indication of the trouble. She waited until her teeth stopped chattering, then said, "I can't tell you over the telephone, Marcel," pleadingly so he would remember that every message of importance passed directly to the talking drums from the native switchboard. "You come alone," she begged.

In ten minutes he was at her desk, solid and smiling until he saw her face. She motioned Emil to take him to the tool-shed. "I can't go back there again," she whispered and, as she waited for Marcel to return, she tried not to hear her conscience crying out.

Marcel reappeared smelling faintly of paraffin "I had Emil put a torch to the beasts," he said "Sent my driver back to town for a coffin. That's all the natives will see coming out of that shed, Sister. A customary coffin for Christian burial. Banza was a convert, wasn't he?"

"One of mine," she said desolately.

"The certificate will have to state death from unknown cause." As if she had spoken in disagreement, Marcel began to argue. "How could anyone say eaten by ants when we know he was blind drunk on *simba* beer? Death by poison happens often when the beer's not properly prepared."

She fought back tears as she stared at his bluff Flemish face. "Thank you, Marcel."

As soon as he had gone, she asked for an interview with Mother Mathilde, and took all the blame upon herself as she reported the incident. "I should have *made* the time to go with Emil, *ma Mère*. I'm sure I'd have thought to keep Banza off the ground . . . ." She coughed and covered her face with her handkerchief.

Mother Mathilde looked at her as she picked up the police report. "Unknown cause," she read aloud "I agree with this. Like Marcel, I've seen too many poisonings from *simba* not to consider it the most likely cause. You must do likewise, Sister." She smiled gently and stiffened her tone. "And now, you must put from you the temptation of excessive self-reproach. You are much too intelligent to give way to that form of self-indulgence."

The matter should have ended there. Her Superior had named it self-indulgence. But she could not rid herself of the feeling of blame. In the ensuing weeks she seemed to be continuously fighting back tears.

Then, one morning in the laboratory she was examining slides. She turned her face away from the microscope to cough, and a sudden impulse came over her to look at her sputum.

"It's ridiculous," she told herself. But her hands were already preparing a slide. She coughed again deliberately, made a stain and looked at it with the high-power lens. The rod-like bacilli of tuberculosis trembled red-violet in the field.

Her first reaction was relief. That's all it is, she thought. That's why I'm always tired and emotional. That's all . . . then she remembered that all white tuberculosis patients were sent home fast because the malady galloped in the tropics.

She gasped. *This is my ticket home* Blessed Lord, don't let this happen to me. But it had happened. Abruptly she snatched the slide from under the microscope and dropped it in the waste-basket.

For the next hour she went on with her work. Another self had taken charge. *Tell no one,* said the stranger self. *You know everything about TB. The afternoon flush won't show beneath your tan. You can control the coughing. You're already allowed to take afternoon naps when the work permits. You can sleep and feed yourself out of this*

Her conscience let the stranger self carry on for an hour. Then Sister Aurélie came with a chart to discuss.

"You have such a gift for diagnosis, Sister Luke," she said, "What does this look like to you?"

Sister Luke read the entries and was about to speak when her conscience jerked her head back from the trusting face in the deep coif, waiting to catch the invisible spray from her lips. She answered off to the side, hoarsely, as though a hand were at her throat.

Sister Aurélie smiled thanks and slipped out of the door For a moment her coif seemed to Sister Luke still to be there, hanging in the air like an empty shell. Into it came the faces of her sisters one by one—the nurses discreetly whispering to her, almost coif to coif, the choir nuns singing out the long O-oho-O breaths of the *Salve* . . . She flew through the corridors to the theatre. The doctor was hunched over a microscope humming to himself.

"I don't know what to do, Doctor," she said to his back. "I'm TB."

He turned round. "That's nothing to joke about!"

"I'm not joking."

He took her by the shoulder. The emotion in his face almost paralysed her. "Who told you? *Who told you?*"

"My own slides . . . the microscope . . . ."

He held her rigid, staring at her as if she had betrayed him Then he said brokenly, "You're the only one in the whole Congo I can work with. . . ." He looked round the theatre as if trying to imagine what it would be like without her. "Take off your habit," he ordered. "Get on the table. I'm going to listen to those lungs."

Her fingers shook as she bared her thorax Maybe she was wrong. Maybe her tired eyes had tricked her. Gruffly he told her to cough, sigh and say thirty-three.

"There's certainly something . . . in the left lobe." He bent over her chest, seeming not to breathe as he listened. "It's a summit lesion . . . a small one." His worried face broke into a smile. "We're lucky, Sister, we can catch this one quickly."

Summit of the lobe where oxygen comes in first, thank God, O thank God, she thought. Then she saw herself sitting there The doctor caught her look of dismay and turned away. Both had forgotten in the tension of the moment that it was forbidden for a nun to be examined without another sister present. The doctor kept his back turned while she buttoned back her habit. But he went on talking.

"You can stand the gold treatment, Sister. It's rough on the kidneys but you're strong. I'll take the responsibility. . . ."

"I've got to tell Mother Mathilde," she said in a low voice. And about this unwitnessed examination and running first to him.

"Why?" He spun round. "Why?" he demanded again, angrily.

"Obedience," she said, "I must. . . ."

"They'll send you home if you do."

"I know. . . ." Two tears rolled down her cheeks.

The sight of them seemed to startle him. He studied her with narrowed eyes like a psychiatrist, probing and pondering. Then he spoke with cold, scientific precision.

"You're afraid, Sister. You wouldn't be able to stand the convent if they sent you home. I'm going to tell you something about yourself. You're not in the mould, Sister, and you never will be. You're what is called a worldly nun—ideal for the public, for the patients. But you'll never be the kind of nun your convent expects you to be. *That's* your illness. The TB is a by-product."

He watched her as her struggle for calm and silence started her coughing. He waited. Then he said in an offhand manner, "But I can cure the by-product, Sister, if you want."

"I want to stay," she said huskily.

His eyes flashed admiration, then closed down with cunning. "You leave it all to me then," he said eagerly. "I'll tell Mother Mathilde in such a way that she cannot send you home—for my sake. We're both responsible for letting you work as you have, for counting on your moral strength while ignoring the physical." He grinned unexpectedly. "The Reverend Mother and I connived in a case like this once before . . . a big fish in colonial affairs, too important to be spared even for a half-year furlough. She saw me pull him through."

He had pulled her out of a dark pit, and the brightness in the theatre almost blinded her. Sunlight shot from the instruments and there seemed to be a weird red light round his atabrine-yellowed face, not at all like a halo. "We've got the dry cool season coming. You can sleep practically in the tree-tops, in the prisoners' pavilion In three months, maybe less . . . . But remember, I'll be working only on the by-product. The main malady is for you to cure." An odd smile made his face quite gentle. "Don't try so hard to be the perfect nun, Sister. Relax . . . you've got to relax."

He pulled off his gown and put on a pongee jacket. At the door he turned and gave her his customary sardonic smile. "To ease that overgrown conscience of yours, Sister, I'm going to tell Mother Mathilde that I myself discovered your condition and gave you no chance to get to her first."

THERE BEGAN for her a strange interlude, lived among tree-tops as children dream of living, with an elegant small monkey as companion. It was the time of her most perfect purity and innocence, with everything coming to her through her feelings, including her awareness of God. He was the rustle of lizards in her thatched roof, the scent of mimosa through the window screens and the slap of banana leaves when the wind blew. Everything was unbelievable, beginning with the overwhelming realization that Mother Mathilde cherished her to the point of weeping when the doctor gave his news.

"I'm going to give you a special rule," the Superior said when she summoned her. "With God's help, I've decided to let you stay and take the risk." She blew her nose, looking at Sister Luke with red eyes full of anxiety and love.

The special rule permitted her to prepare the day's nursing schedule, which Sister Aurélie would carry out. One of the mine doctors would assist in the surgery. She would take all her meals in her room, and was dispensed from community devotions.

The prisoners' pavilion where she lived was a two-storied annex at the back of the hospital, built in native style with a thatched roof. The lower floor housed occasional prisoners from the town jail who needed treatment in hospital. Her circular room under the thatch was walled with fine-meshed screen which became visible only when lights were on. Then it was a curtain of night moths beating softly from the outside with huge brown velvet wings.

The doctor came himself the first day to show her how his "oysters" must be consumed. He had procured a pair of fine crystal wine-glasses; in each was a raw egg yolk sprinkled with chopped parsley and lemon juice

He saw her staring at the glasses.

"Presentation is everything to a TB, Sister," he said, smiling. He put a glass in each hand and told her to swallow the yolks as if they were oysters. "In addition to this twice daily and your regular meals, you'll be awakened each night at ten for sardine sandwiches and two glasses of white muscat wine."

He inspected the room, discovered her microscope hidden under the wash-stand, picked it up and went out of the door with it, humming an air from *Tosca*.

And so it began—three months of spoiling. The community spun a cocoon of loving-kindness about her.

Sister Eucharistia made the first visit. The old nun carried a baby monkey for which she had promised to find a home, and when Sister Luke took the nervous long-tailed body on her two palms and asked, "Will Mother Mathilde permit?" Sister Eucharistia smiled and said, "Beelzebub told her that the cure depended on your having and doing what you want."

The news about her filtered out. Wines began appearing in Mother Mathilde's office with cards from patients who remembered the nun praying beside their beds in the night. Wives of the dressing boys brought eggs and chickens. The talking drums carried the news to the bush and Father Vermeuhlen sent a letter reminding her that *God let happen what must happen for her own good* . . . and telling her that his black boys were carving her an ivory tusk which she would receive in due time from a runner.

By the end of her first month in the tree house, she had taught Felix the monkey to sit beside her at her solitary dining-table, napkin round his neck, and eat delicately from a plate. Afternoons, when she napped, he plucked at her covers with his tiny black hands when it was time to get up and read the Office. When she knelt for evening prayers, he sat on the high hospital bed, holding both feet in his hands and staring at her with his queer little golden eyes until she crossed herself; then he flung himself at her in a single leap and wrapped his long wiry arms about her neck.

She never talked to him after the grand silence, but sometimes she laughed softly as she carried him about the room to look at the moths festooning the screens. A snap of the light switch plunged them both into the tree-tops, with the thousand forms of nocturnal life that sang, whistled and moaned in the bush.

In two months she gained ten pounds, and her optimism flew high, not only for her eventual cure, but for everything that would happen to her henceforth. That, she knew, was a characteristic of the tuberculous. Yet somehow she felt that her own high hopes would not vanish with her cure. She brushed away the doctor's preposterous remark about her main malady. She was obeying his orders to relax, to live from day to day. It astonished her to learn how simple life could be when you took each day



like a gift from God with no strings attached. One afternoon she was standing by the screen windows reciting the Office of Lauds. Her heart leaped with happiness as she called upon the light and darkness to bless the Lord, on the mountains and the hills, the seas and the rivers and all that move in the waters. *Benedicite, O all ye beasts and cattle, bless ye the Lord* . . . .

This is how a nun should be! she thought suddenly. This is what is meant by being a child of God. . . . She stared out at the mimosa trees. The faces of the many happy nuns she knew, who had sometimes seemed quite childish in their unquestioning acceptance of everything that happened to them, seemed to smile back at her.

Now you know, they seemed to say. *Live from day to day. There are always the graces to help us over the rough spots.*

"I had to fall ill to learn this," she said to her monkey. She walked about the room with Felix clinging to her skirts as she took her temperature. It was down to normal for the first time at that special hour when fever always showed. A week later all her slides showed negative. Back in the community she felt at first like a traveller returned from some beautiful land of silence and solitude. There was much more sound in a convent than she had remembered. The varying vibrations from a score of women made a sort of thin high humming like the singing of telephone wires strung across space.

CHAPTER 7

THE MONASTIC LIFE had plateau periods without sign-post or road-block, and the next two years were one of these for Sister Luke. Her inner peace was rich and profound. She worked prodigiously. The drama of the expanding Congo touched off a patriotic pride she accepted tranquilly as one of those atavisms which every nun brought to the convent from her former life and never quite outgrew.

She listened to her male patients talking about cobalt and uranium and a cotton crop close to thirty thousand tons in 1938. Railways had thrust deeper into the interior. Sister Luke felt a sweet possessiveness for A.M.I.—*Assistants Médicaux Indigènes,* or Native Medical Assistants, an organization the government had created in 1935, a year after she had trained her first team of dressing boys

In the autumn of 1938, Mother Mathilde prepared to go back to Belgium for the election of a new Superior General, which took place every six years She allocated her authority meticulously and Sister Luke was given total responsibility for the hospital.

"For you," the Superior said to her in parting counsel, "I urge above all moderation. Since your TB attack you have had no respite. But I shall bring back a qualified nurse to take over the theatre. Meanwhile, I pray you will have no special problems."

"There will be no problems." Sister Luke smiled serenely at the sturdy little matriarch. "We're going to try to have that addition to the Maternity completed for your return, *ma Mère.*"

SHE AND Sister Aurélie took turns supervising the building of the Maternity Annex, sharing the joy of completing a project long dreamed of by Mother Mathilde.

The Italian contractor had hired boys from the bush to augment his own skilled masons and carpenters. The bush boys scurried like monkeys through the scaffolding, singing incessantly as they worked, and, when their wives came once a week, drums were brought out and there was singing and dancing in the temporary compound

"It whets my thirst for souls just to look at them," Sister Aurélie confided wistfully. When it was her turn to supervise, she always took a first-aid kit. "I bait my hook with this," she said to Sister Luke. Occasionally one of the bush boys came shyly to her with a cut to be bandaged Then, speaking fluent Kiswahili and smiling disarmingly, she learned his name, his village, the number of his wives and how many children the Supreme Being had enriched him with . . . "that Great One," she would say, "who is the same as my God . . . yes, yes, the very same"

Sister Luke shared her companion's eagerness for converts. All through November she and Sister Aurélie cultivated the bush boys and made secret plans to lure them to the Christmas Eve service. And all through November, as Sister Luke was to learn later, one of the witch-doctors who ruled their lives out in the bush was telling a boy that if he could kill a white woman he would be freed for ever from the spirit of a dead wife who haunted him.

In the fortnight before Christmas, Sister Aurélie had the night watch in Maternity when the bush boy came He had made a cut on his thumb and he held it up bleeding as he peered through the glass of the post-natal ward. Sister Aurélie went to the door with a happy smile and opened it.

Six women saw the first act. The boy thrust himself into the ward with a club of wood held behind his back. He looked about wildly, then suddenly he lifted his club and crashed it down on Sister Aurélie's skull

The skull was split open at the first blow but the one patient who had not fainted saw Sister Aurélie walk slowly towards the bush boy, backing him step by step from the ward. The woman began to scream as she saw the nun fall to the floor. She screamed while Emil came and wrestled the crazed native into submission and continued screaming as Sister Luke came flying down the corridor, seeing as in a nightmare the

two panting black forms and the blood on Sister Aurélie's still, white shape.

Her hand was absolutely steady as she shot sedative into the screaming patient, drowning away the voice of hysteria . . . "She was dead, Sister, when she walked towards him . . . dead and smiling and she walked . . . ."

"No, Madame . . . no . . . sleep now . . . ."

She telephoned the Acting Superior before she left the ward; then she stepped quietly into the corridor.

Emil and his night-duty boys had the maniac bound and were sitting on him, their eyes feral with fright. She knelt and for the second time in her religious life put her fingers on a sister's warm wrist that had no pulse.

Then the other deputies of Mother Mathilde were there, Sisters Marie-Rose, Monique and Eucharistia. Without breaking the grand silence, the four of them carried Sister Aurélie to the treatment-room and laid her on the table, bending back into shell shape the crushed coif, folding the dead hands over the pectoral cross

Father Stephen came with the oils for extreme unction and Sister Marie-Rose, the Acting Superior, brought the little paper promising obedience to God until death, which she placed between the folded hands. Sister Luke remained on vigil, with Sister Marie-Rose. Kneeling, she gazed stunned at the calm profile that showed no distortion from a death by violence. The tom-toms were beating the story out to the bush without pause.

All I know, she said silently to Sister Aurélie, is that you smiled as you walked towards that door because you thought you had a convert on the hook. Our thirst for souls, my little sister. Do you remember how we plotted to bring them to chapel at Christmas-time with our Christian boys? *That* will fetch them, we said with our eyes. But Christ wasn't satisfied with our little hooks. He wanted the whole net thrown.

It was hard to realize that she was looking at the whole net thrown, as her bitter inner voice cried out against the senseless slaughter.

THE CONFIDENCE of every black had to be won again and that made, in the end, the story of the continuing mission which shot the light of faith into the report Sister Luke wrote for the mother house.

She knew that some of her sisters had fear when, after the funeral, they returned to their posts and met their boys. The boys outnumbered the sisters twenty to one in every department and their black faces were suddenly ugly and estranged with shame.

Even Emil—a convert, familiar with whites for years—refused to look at her when she entered the hospital. As she approached the desk, he started off quickly, hunched forward as though a lash curled over his back.

"If you're on your way to the Contagious, Emil," she called out after him, "would you please take these papers to Sister Margarita?" Grey and shrunken, he turned to look at her. She pulled him back to her with a smile.

"The sisters are not angry with us?" he asked in Kiswahili, as if his race had lost the right to speak in the tongue of the murdered one.

"Emil, you are a Christian like us. You know our hearts have no place for rancour. We are not angry."

"But with that one then, Mama Luke . . . that shame of shames we gave over to Monsieur Marcel last night?"

"Not even with him, Emil."

He stared at her, his brow wrinkled in thought. Slowly a wonder overcame the fear in his eyes. "If such a death happened to one of ours, Mama Luke, we would stake the murderer out along the river-bank and each fisherman would cut a piece of his flesh for bait until there was nothing left but his bones."

"You *would* have, Emil, if . . ." she touched the small gold cross on a thong about his neck ". . . if, I say, you were not wearing that sign of Him who taught us to forgive."

A queer little smile wreathed his face as when, sometimes in the labs, she caught him in an error he knew better than to make. "Mama Luke . . . ." From the pocket of his shorts he drew a twisted bunch of feathers and claws on a string and laid it on the desk. "Illunga tore this off that shame of shames last night, so that in prison he'll have no protection from his evil spirits."

She looked at the fetish. Her heart beat so fast she couldn't speak for a moment. Illunga . . . the last of their unbaptized black boys. Her hand closed over the charm so tightly that its claws pricked her palm. Illunga, she whispered to Sister Aurélie . . . it was his grief for you

that gave him courage to touch this witch thing. You have one on the hook, my little sister, you have one on the hook.

Presently she opened her hand and held out the fetish to Emil. "You must send it back to the boy in jail," she said. "He must have this to protect him against the law."

"But it will not, Mama Luke!"

"That's just what we must let him find out for himself, Emil," she said very softly. She took him into the conspiracy with a smile that brought his own back again He went off like a runner burdened with news for his boys.

In the days that followed, the nuns spoke often in the recreation of Sister Aurélie, but never with any grief in their low thoughtful voices. A true nun worked until she dropped, prayed until she was hollow and hoped humbly and continuously that one day the Blessed Lord would take her up to Heaven through a little martyrdom that would cause her unfinished business on earth to go on like Sister Aurélie's. For three more of the sisters had received, without asking, the fetishes their boys wore. They had given them back to the boys exactly as she had done, to be tried and found wanting. As if a single intelligence inspired all our separate brains, Sister Luke thought.

"In the first shock, I called it senseless slaughter," she said aloud. "I even cried out against Christ for the injustice."

"I think we all did," said the Acting Superior. "It is no cause for self-reproach. If we understood on the instant every one of God's mysterious moves, we would no longer be here, would we?"

The nuns nodded appreciatively. From us all, Sister Luke thought, she has lifted that last shadow of remorse for those bitter hours when we cried *Why? Why?* as we followed the body to its hasty grave.

The thrumming night beat in against their small circle of light under the kiosk. The temperature of the December midsummer was stifling· the parched earth gave back after sundown all the blazing heat it had sucked in during the day. Only crickets and bats had the will to move in the torrid dark, she thought . . . and nuns. She listened to the click of their knitting needles making a busy local obbligato to the bat squeaks and insect shrilling

And she smiled as she recalled the familiar maxim of the cloister: *There is no heroism in the convent.*

MIDNIGHT MASS on Christmas Eve in the Congo was always a moving event. Sister Luke had sung five of them, but this year she was on call and she sat in the pews, staring like all the others at the little stable the nuns had built of bamboo and palm fronds. She sensed the emotions of the lonely young businessmen in the pews around her and of the rum-soaked colonials who had left their parties and come to the convent chapel. Above all, she felt the electric excitement from the black boys of the convent staff. Sandwiched in between them, wearing borrowed cotton shorts and shirts, were the wild little bush boys they had brought with them to see the show. In the hush that followed the midnight bells she heard the tinkle of the bush boys' bracelets as they reached out suddenly to hold hands with their guardian brothers.

The splendid processional of her sisters, clad in fresh white choir capes, came through the portals from the cloister. The nuns circled the altar with candlelight on their faces; the chapel bells rang in and out of their singing, then their voices soared with the organ as the Superior laid on its bed of straw a porcelain figure with dimpled knees and curling fists *And Christ is born again . . . And Christ is born again!* sang her sisters as the pealing bells came in from on high.

They're sitting there just like little ebony statues, Sister Aurélie. They've got their feathers and fangs still about their necks. But they're *here,* my little sister, and there's not a breath out of one of them . . . not a breath.

AFTER THE three Masses, most of the nuns took advantage of the annual indulgence to go to the refectory for fruits and a glass of wine or chilled cocoa. They had to continue in the grand silence, but they could smile and talk with their eyes. "Sister Aurélie must have seen those little savages in chapel. Of course, it is presumption even to mention the possibility, but one must say it's quite strange they came without any urging from us."

"I missed her grievously in the processional. She always preceded me, sometimes covered up for me when I couldn't reach the high notes."

Sister Luke smiled as she sipped her wine. Most of the sisters, she saw, had tied towels over their starched bibs and were eating their mangoes as Sister Aurélie had urged them to do—without benefit of knives and forks, which were, she used to say, a desecration of this superlative

bounty of God. Sister Monique, who had never before been seen to eat a fruit with her fingers, might have been identifying its botanical origin, but Sister Luke knew she was doing nothing of the sort. She was saying silently, "You're absolutely right, my little sister, this is the only way to eat a mango." Her eyes caught Sister Luke's and smiled as she laid down the fibre-fringed stone.

Mother Mathilde returned a fortnight after New Year's Day in that fateful year of 1939. Sister Luke heard the plane go over the hospital as she did her rounds. In the first recreation, she reflected, Mother Mathilde would have much to tell her nuns of the unanimous re-election of the Reverend Mother Emmanuel and of messages from families and friends who had visited her. But Sister Luke ran ahead in her thoughts to the next morning when she would have her private interview.

"My spiritual health, *ma Mère*," she would say. "There has been a crystallization Our tragic event taught me many things I did not know. There's no more flux of uncertainty. . "

"You look like the cat that swallowed the canary," said the doctor, who had been standing before her desk watching her talk to herself. He put out his hand and grinned. "May I have the Englebert file for Mother Mathilde? I'm on my way to greet her."

He leafed through the file she handed him. "I see you were up with him again last night Was it a suicide threat?"

"It was nothing, Doctor He quieted down like a lamb."

"You're the only one who can handle Englebert and you know it. I ought to be grateful, but I'm not when I look at you. I wonder, Sister, when, if ever, you get any sleep."

He studied her for several moments, then he began to hum. The plan he formulated to a tune from *Tosca* put a glint in his narrowed eyes. She watched him walk away humming, using the file as a fan.

The file lay off to the side of Mother Mathilde's desk as the Superior blessed her, embraced her, and then held her by the shoulders as she said, "You have lost weight, my child How I have thought about you. I knew how close you were to Sister Aurélie, how difficult it must have been for you to accept God's will." She let go of the shoulders and returned to her chair.

"No, *ma Mère*. God shed His graces, more than I merit." The words poured from her eagerly. Before she was half-way through, a smile of pleased surprise was playing round Mother Mathilde's lips. Sister Luke made no effort to curb the exaltation in her voice. This was no self-delusion. It was a lifting up of inner strength that felt solid as a second skeleton inside her. "Like the strength after a retreat, *ma Mère* . . . . I have been so eager to tell you."

Mother Mathilde continued smiling. Her hand looked very strong and purposeful as it stroked the dark wood of her crucifix.

"It is very wonderful what you tell me, Sister. It means that the Master Himself has prepared you for what I am going to tell you." She picked up the Englebert file and leaned forward. "All last evening, Sister, I was pondering how to tell you that I must send you back to Belgium with this case. You are the only one qualified in psychiatric nursing."

From the moment she said *send you back to Belgium,* Sister Luke did not move her eyes from her Superior's. The low voice went on talking naturally and nurse-like of a nursing problem.

". . . of course, you know the importance of this man in the colony and how urgent it is to get him to the proper sanatorium."

It was Sister Luke's turn to speak now, to prove that her voice was as steady as the soul her Superior inspected in a continuing gaze. "And the doctor?" she asked, with a little lift that asked, "What will *he* do?"

"Dr. Fortunati made it simple for me, Sister, by suggesting you. He will take his long overdue holiday when you leave, and arrange for all the surgery to be done by the mine doctors. I must say," Mother Mathilde went on, "that it will be easier for your successor, who is coming by ship."

Your successor Successor . . . one who takes the place of . . . .

"*Ma Mère* . . " She hesitated. "Will I . . . will they . . . send me back here, do you think?"

A flash of something very like compassion shot from Mother Mathilde's dark eyes. "I am certain that the mother house will return you as soon as possible," she said firmly. "*I* shall certainly want you back. Of course, it will depend on how our Reverend Mother Emmanuel finds your spiritual health and the doctor your physical health." She smiled disarmingly. "After what you've told me, Sister, I have no concern about either finding."

As Sister Luke crossed the gardens on her way back to the hospital, she looked round at the world she loved, taking in impressions like a traveller storing food for a journey. A lizard sat on a stone, looking like the act of listening caught in a copper casting. "I'm coming back, you beautiful thing," she whispered. "Coming *back*, do you hear?" She watched him disappear in a flash of flame

She went at once to the doctor, who looked up from his desk and gave her a business-like nod "Well, Sister, we've got a lot to do," he said briskly. She jotted down his instructions. Mild sedatives for the three-day train ride, two native guards from the *Force Publique* to ride as far as Lobito, then the ship's doctor to share the responsibility. "I'm writing him a letter," he said in the same professional tone, "explaining which one is the patient."

She looked up startled and saw his sardonic smile. "I was joking, Sister," he said. "But you do warrant a bit of medical supervision considering what lies ahead of you."

She stared at him. His narrow red eyes were scalpel-sharp.

"Don't you realize that you are about to put to the test that religious strength you're so sure of?" There was no sarcasm now in his voice or face. "The moment you walk into your mother house that strength, Sister, which has never had a real work-out here, will meet its test. Suppose you were detained there indefinitely. Would the strength be enough then, Sister?"

"Yes, of course," she said, as though a body lay between them on the table and he had asked, Is everything in order?

"You're sure, Sister?"

She nodded, not to waste further words.

"Well I'm not," he said with sudden anger. His emotion caught her unprepared.

"Then why on earth did you suggest me to Mother Mathilde?"

"To prove to you that you're wrong," he said slowly, grimly. "To prove to you something I've been telling you for years, even if it costs me you. To prove . . . ."

She gave him no chance to say it. She turned on her heel and left the room.

IT WAS all quite preposterous, but he had sowed a seed. *Was* this new

strength sufficient only for here? She tried herself out by giving up bits of the Congo as she encountered people and things close to her heart. She saw Emil, coming towards her now, his face aglow with devotion, and she told herself that soon she would see him for the last time. The tropic rain burst over the hospital roof and she gave up its thrilling tattoo and the wild, sweet smell of earth it beat up from the ground.

Curiously enough, she discovered that giving up the doctor would be, after Mother Mathilde, the most difficult severance. His twisted face full of anger that looked like love, his faith in her judgment, the peculiar bond that bound them breathless over a flickering life on the operating-table . . . one by one, relentlessly, she excised them from her.

His buzzer cut short her thoughts. She hurried down the hall.

He was still sitting at his desk, hands folded serenely. He looked at her reprovingly. "I'm surprised at you, Sister, running off duty. As if that were the first time we've disagreed on a diagnosis." He asked her forgiveness with a malicious smile. "As if you didn't know I'm always fearful of that one time in a hundred when you have been right."

"One time in a hundred! . . . You monster of vanity," she said . . . and she gave that up too, their way of fighting and making up, as she fumbled for her notebook, looking down at her skirt pocket so he wouldn't see her tears.

CHAPTER 8

THREE WEEKS later she was on her way to the mother house.

Her black boys had made a bridal bower of her compartment on the boat-train Walls, ceilings and seats were solidly covered with white blossoms—orchids, azaleas and begonias. Great clusters of wistaria hung from the corners with gifts concealed among the blooms. The floor was covered with native baskets filled with choice fruits, topped with stalks of the tiny finger-length bananas called *bitika* which her boys knew she loved.

Next to her compartment was that of Monsieur Englebert with two native guards outside his door. She gave her patient a mild sedative before the train pulled out, then returned to the overwhelming sweetness of her bower, to watch the most momentous years of her religious life fade from view.

Until that final moment, she had successfully dominated every emotion of leave-taking and maintained the belief that she was coming back. But when the whistle blew and she saw Mother Mathilde and her dressing boys slipping away from her, a bolt of pain tore through her heart. She sat down next to the window on the only seat space her boys had left uncovered. She didn't have to look out to watch the Congo going by. She had the Congo with her in the compartment. She touched the floral upholstery and felt a lump. Then she drew forth from beneath a cushion of blooms a black statue carved in ebony.

It was a naked kneeling woman about fifteen inches high, with a collar of necklaces and small blunt hands carved flatly against bended knees. The face lifted with haunting beauty, its eyes half closed, and the heavy black lips suggested silent supplication before a God too immense to speak to or look at. She turned it round in her hands. The names *Emil* and *Bakongo* were carved into the soles of the little square feet. She set the ebony statue on her lap and began to cry.

After a while, she set the statue back on its bed of flowers. She leaned down and took from one of the baskets a handful of finger-sized bananas. Then she went to the next compartment to begin caring for the gentle little man whom King Leopold had once decorated for signal service in the colony.

The guards saluted her smartly and said, "Mama Luke!"

"You may go back to your sleeping-car until Lobito," she said. She saw their faces fall and switched to Kiswahili. "When I banish those devils of sunstroke from Monsieur Englebert, they will roam this corridor. I want you both safely aside." Her smile restored their prestige. They went away with shoulders squared.

She entered the compartment, turning her back deliberately on her patient as she pulled the door shut. "He's no more deranged than the car conductor," she whispered to God. "Give me Your help to prove it."

She went to the window and lowered the blinds to cut off the African sun that smote her heart and her patient's eyes. Then she sat down beside him and shared her bananas.

"Tomorrow, Monsieur Englebert," she said musingly, "I may invite you to my compartment. It is full of white flowers and baskets of fruit." She gave him a sideways glance. "Boxes of chocolates also. You and I must eat those perishables before we come to Lobito."



"In this heat, but of course, Sister," said Monsieur Englebert. He gave her a smile of complete agreement and accepted another small banana from her outstretched hand.

THE MOTHER HOUSE was the only place in Belgium that the Congo had not dwarfed. Immense, impersonal, it sent a little chill through her as when she had first entered it to put on her postulant's cape. She looked down at her black scapular, the vestment of the Living Rule. Was she one? God alone could say.

The nun in the porter's cubbyhole stepped forward and gave her the delicate embrace reserved for returning missionaries Then she dropped her disciplined eyes immediately from Sister Luke's tanned expectant

face and made no comment on the worn suit-case handed over at the door, which obviously contained something weightier than the Rule allowed—the Bakongo statue which the Vestiaire, Sister Eudoxie, would automatically confiscate.

Sister Luke stood still in the foyer to get used to having no one look at her. As the bells of Vespers tolled, she slipped like a black ghost into the files of her sisters chapel-bound. Then, as always, following the chill came the beauty. When the choirs began the Gregorian chant, she had her welcome home. As long as there is this each day in the house, she thought . . . . With the *Magnificat* she shut her eyes and listened to the virgin voices singing the Virgin's song. After the fifteen voices in the Congo, the hundred sopranos of the mother house nearly swept her off her feet

The devotion ended, she went to report to the Superior General. As she sat in a row of nuns on a sort of mourners' bench in the ante-room, she read the calendar on the antique desk. March 15, 1939. On the quay in Antwerp that morning, while she was handing her patient over to his family, she had heard newsboys crying headlines about German troops occupying Czechoslovakia What would it be like to be in a convent if war came? she wondered. There was something Sister Eucharistia had said, but the words eluded her.

A nun emerged from the Superior General's office and another went in. Sister Luke moved up one place on the bench. This is how it will be in a convent even if war comes, she told herself. Each one of us secretly struggling with a problem of nature or of the soul, waiting to go in under the X-ray eyes of the Reverend Mother Emmanuel which will pierce through to the places of inner conflict where there never has been any truce, not since Christ's time began on earth . . . . "Never a truce," she whispered as she moved up another place.

The Superior General stepped forward when she finally entered the office, laid both hands upon her shoulders, leaned down and embraced her warmly, as though holding her to an understanding heart When she returned to her high-backed chair Sister Luke saw Emil's statue on the bookshelf behind the desk. It was set sideways to reveal the posture of prayer. "You have been doing overtime for many years, my child," said the Superior General. "We will keep you here for at least a month to do nothing but rest and refresh your soul. Receive family and friends

at all hours save when the community does its spiritual exercises. You were a Martha for a long time, Sister. Now, try to be a Mary."

"I shall try, Reverend Mother."

"You may chafe at first with no work to do and no errant souls to bring back to the faith." The Reverend Mother's eyes sparkled. "It is amazing to everyone, Sister, how many converts you made in the colony. You must have been beloved by God, and you were liked and respected by everyone out there . . ." she turned her head slightly towards the shelf where the statue was ". . . including your black boys, I see."

Now that it had been mentioned, she could look directly at Emil's ebony. Her eyes caressed it for a moment.

"It is a beautiful gift, Sister," said the Reverend Mother. "And how beautifully it symbolizes the whole of that dark continent. Do you wish me to give it to your father?"

Sister Luke heard the veiled yearning in the question. The Superior General was really saying, For your soul's sake I should dearly love you to be able to give this up. . . .

"I should prefer, Reverend Mother, that it be kept in the mother-house museum, to which it really belongs."

"You are generous, Sister," said the Reverend Mother.

Sister Luke felt that this conversation about the statue had a special reason. It struck her that perhaps her deep attachment for the Congo, so contrary to the Rule, was more visible in this house of total abnegation than she had supposed. It had been made quite clear she was to remain in Belgium longer than Mother Mathilde had suggested.

HER FATHER was the first visitor. "You are thin, *ma petite!*" he said, exactly as he had twice before. He embraced her, then stood her off from him, with combative lights in his blue eyes. "I don't believe, of course, all that rubbish about your having had TB in the Congo. No one can survive it in the tropics."

The reunion was easy then. She described Dr. Fortunati's cure and saw the sallow face of Beelzebub as she talked. She saw the golden eyes of Felix peering up from the cradle of her arms as she had paced the tree-top room reciting the Offices happily.

"Of course, they'll send you back after a little change-of-climate furlough," her father said.

"Perhaps," she said. "But if there should be war . . . ." Then, in a flash, she remembered what Sister Eucharistia had said about the mission in wartime. "In '14 to '18 we were completely cut off from the mother house. And then, after four long years of silence, the sisters starting to come out again to the colony . . . ."

"Are you ill, Gaby?" her father asked. "Your face . . . ."

"No, no . . . ." She forced a smile.

"There'll be no war," said her father. "Of course," he added honestly, "that may be wishful thinking. Antoine is in the Reserve already and the two younger are of military age."

"The two little boys!" Sister Luke stared at her father and shivered. In the last war, she knew, he had spied on the Germans and there had been a price on his head. If war came now he would have to flee the country She shivered again.

"I'd take a little caffeine until you acclimatize to our March winds," her father said gently

When he was gone, she could feel the immense community waiting for her return to it, with its two hundred pairs of eyes cast down yet seeing all. She took a caffeine capsule from her pocket and slipped it into her mouth as she made her way to the nuns' dormitory for the half-hour rest she had promised Reverend Mother Emmanuel she would take. Lying on the straw mattress that rustled as she shook, she felt the action of the caffeine on her heart, which began to beat rapidly and strong.

She shut her eyes. She was back with Emil in the operating-room that last day Dr. Fortunati came in the instant they were ready for him. He ignored the body on the table and looked at her "I've got your successor trained up to instrument nurse," he said, "but that's as far as she'll go." His face was a lacquered lantern swinging in a boundless space of sun and winds. "That girl was born to be a nun, something you could never be in a thousand years."

"You're not in love with him?" Mother Mathilde asked.

That was in her second Congo year. She was on the river again with Mother Mathilde, who questioned her in Flemish so the paddle boys would not understand. "Because if you are in love and have not told me, my child, it would break my heart."

"Ah no, *ma Mère!*" The pirogue rolled with her sudden movement of dismay. "Of course I've not fallen in love!" But isn't it wonderful,

she thought, how frankly and freely we always talk together? "I only cherish him, *ma Mère,* for his skill and selflessness when there's a life to be saved. I think always he is very close to God when he operates."

On the forward seat of the pirogue Mother Mathilde stood like a figurehead. "I'm so glad you told me, Sister," she said simply. . . .

After a while the images faded. Her chill had subsided but there was a pain in her heart. At Vespers, she knelt in her pew and folded her hands. "Help me to detach from those memories," she said. "Oh God, how can I be a Mary if I can't get the Congo out of my blood? Help me to be like her. Help me to say *Thy will* with her perfect grace." She turned the pages of her Little Office as she prayed and moved her lips as if chanting the psalms with her sisters.

THE WAR TALK, however unbelievable, pushed the Congo back a little in Sister Luke's mind. There will be a need for nurses right here, she thought. Maybe that's why God gives no sign that I'll be sent back to the Congo. The realization that her burning wish would no longer leap from her eyes gave her the courage to go to the Reverend Mother Emmanuel.

"I wish to go back to work again, Reverend Mother. I don't make a very good Mary." She smiled pleadingly.

The Reverend Mother showed no surprise. She had seldom known a missionary able to sit out the rest she had earned

"Very well, then, my child. We shall see."

We shall see . . . . Sister Luke knew that the state of her soul would be weighed in the sensitive balances of the Superior General's mind. She spent most of the next days in the chapel, firm in the conviction that her prayers would be answered.

After five days she saw her name on the notice-board posted for transfer, as an assistant in pulmonary surgery, to La Trinité hospital, on the Dutch border.

"Pulmonary surgery would have been my choice had I dreamed there was a vacancy," she told the Reverend Mother Emmanuel.

"Yet I hesitated to send you there, Sister," the Superior General said. "The Superior, Mother Didyma, was a born missionary, but we could never spare her administrative talents so sorely needed here. She had to give up her dream of the missions. Each time I send her a missionary,

I'm sure it revives those old longings and gives her pain. . . ." The Reverend Mother's powerful eyes shot the warning. "You will have to have a great spirit of faith at La Trinité, my child."

Sister Luke left the operating-room of La Trinité, after an emergency operation, at five o'clock in the morning on May 10, 1940. The practice bombs that morning had seemed closer in than usual, but for months now the Belgian army had been mobilized and military manœuvres no longer suggested threat.

She accompanied the doctor to the main door, and stepped out with him for a breath of air. Dawn turned the sky shrimp-pink and there were small puffs of white clouds drifting about in it. She remembered with a pang the mountains of charged cumulus that would be floating over the Congo.

Suddenly the doctor stiffened beside her. "Those aren't clouds, Sister. They're parachutes. It's invasion!" He started running towards his car, crying back to her to get in and stay in.

She stood transfixed, gripping her crucifix. The flower-like forms dropped out of the dawn with bodies dangling. She was seeing the Germans come for the second time in her life.

"A second time!" she whispered aghast. And she was a child again, peering through the lace curtains of her grandmother's house at the Kaiser's Death-Head Hussars riding over the cobbles. She had thought they were princes out of a fairy-tale and she didn't learn to hate until the Germans moved into their house and she saw her mother and grandmother waiting on them like frightened servants and freezing silently each time they were asked about the whereabouts of her father. . . .

Hate shook her as she watched them come, this time in a sinister kind of beauty. It ran like flames through her blood. She heard her conscience saying *Thou shalt not kill* as she killed each one of the distant paratroopers deliberately with her thoughts. Then she spun on her heel and went back into the convent.

In the chapel, she listened to her sisters chanting antique Latin while Germans were dropping among the dunes. You had to squint your eyes, she remembered angrily, to see that the bulky forms were helmeted and carried assault arms. Months earlier it had been rumoured that Nazi spies were parachuting in dressed as nuns—the advance reconnaissance

in a predominantly Catholic country, it was said. After that, nuns who wished to were allowed to grow their hair without special permission, in case the police picked them up when duty took them to town, mistaking them for Germans in disguise.

She offered up her Mass for the salvation of her countrymen but her conscience forbade her to go to the communion-rail with the burden of hate that was in her heart.

Later, at breakfast, Sister Luke watched the Superior's collected face while her ears strained through the silence. Just as a faint ack-ack clattered from the direction of Hasselt, Mother Didyma plucked her coarse napkin from under her chin, laid it forward on the table and went to the pulpit.

"Benedicite," she said to her nuns.

"Dominus," they replied, a little muted with surprise. Something different was happening in the refectory this morning.

"Early this morning," said the Superior, "I had a telephone call from our Reverend Mother Emmanuel. Belgium was bombarded at five o'clock." Her voice was dry, without inflexion.

Sister Luke was the only one not staring at the Superior. She looked at the nuns one by one—at Sister Ignatius, whose brother was with her own brother Antoine, in Namur; at Sister Beatrice, whose father commanded the fortress of Liège. Not a flicker of fear or anguish showed on any face.

"I tell you this only that you will be prepared," said Mother Didyma. "There will be panic in the hospital. Our work must go on as if nothing has happened . . ."

Three bursts of artillery broke into her speech. She paused as for an ill-bred interruption. Then she went on. "It is for you to set the example of courage and calm for the patients and the lay student nurses. All further developments will be posted on the notice-board." She looked at them sharply to make sure that all understood there was to be no war talk in her community

For the first time Sister Luke felt a flash of admiration for her chilly, inscrutable Superior.

In the next eighteen days refugees poured frantically into the convent hospital, and the nuns tightened their belts as they shared their slender

reserves of food. The letters from the Reverend Mother Emmanuel which were pinned up on the notice-board exhorted the sisters to be discreet with strangers, to make no search for their families without permission, to take no part in patriotic affairs. On May 28 a single bleak sentence carried the news that King Leopold had signed a surrender during Dunkirk. *The sisters*, wrote the Superior General, *are urged not to read the clandestine newspapers of the underground.* Food became scarcer and Red Cross ambulances appeared regularly outside the hospital loaded with casualties picked up from the strafed highways. Meanwhile, the clandestine newspapers were beginning to circulate, and one of Sister Luke's students told her that Belgian bishops had been instructed by the Cardinal to refuse Holy Communion to those who consorted with the enemy. Her latent patriotism began to beat within her like a steady pulse. She could not know with certainty that her father was travelling the risky road towards France, but she listened deliberately now to the war talk of her student lay nurses.

When she took the telephone calls that came for her students she would hear a voice that tried to sound like a priest's saying, "I am Father John, Sister . . . this is urgent." She would call the girl, then look at her secret, excited face when, afterwards, she asked permission to go into the town. One night Sister Luke climbed the stairs to the students' dormitory and spoke to the girl who received the most telephone calls "Wasn't that excuse to go out today a mere fantasy, Lisa? You've used that sick uncle twice."

"Oh Sister, have I?" Lisa looked at her with confidence crystallizing in her wide grey eyes, fringed with dark lashes Then she said in a hurried whisper, "We are distributing food-ration stamps to our boys in hiding, Sister," making her one of them with the unexpected admission.

Sister Luke stopped her with a gesture "That's enough, Lisa," she said. "I won't ask for more." I won't because I cannot, she thought with a flare of longing She turned to leave, then said very low, "Tell your intermediary not to say that he is a priest. Any nun would know at once from his voice that he is not."

The next time Sister Luke took a call for Lisa, the intermediary called her by name. "I heard of your help, Sister Luke," he said. "Thank you and God bless you."

That evening she read again the Reverend Mother Emmanuel's

exhortation not to engage in patriotic activities. It doesn't say *forbidden,* she told herself. But her conscience reminded her that the Superior's wish was accepted instantly as law in the heart of every Rule-abiding nun. Had any of the quiet sisters around her transgressed as she had? She would never know: the underground was as sealed as the confessional. What I do from now on, she told her conscience at last, is between me and God alone.

SISTER LUKE met her first German face to face the day she accepted a British flyer from the underground.

The familiar voice of the intermediary who no longer tried to sound like a priest had said over the telephone: "You'll receive a package of cigarettes in about an hour, Sister. British-made. Enough for one night only."

She found work to do among the stretchers that littered the foyer. One hour after the telephone call, an ambulatory case dressed in rough clothes, with a knitted cap pulled down part way over head bandages, came in the door. She knew with instant certainty that he was her "package of cigarettes."

"Cough," she whispered in English as she led him upstairs to the tuberculosis wing, and he coughed so all the foyer could hear. She locked him in a private room. Then, to make it safe from night inspection, she stuffed the tube of a formaldehyde machine through the keyhole, and began to tape up the door with paste and strips of newspaper. It would look as though the room was being fumigated after a death. As she got the first strip across the top of the door, she heard boots on the stairs and guttural voices. Then came Mother Didyma's dry voice, saying more loudly than she ever spoke, "Up here we have our TB cases."

She knows, Sister Luke thought. She must have seen me by-pass the Admissions Office when I brought him up A strip of gummy paper was wrapped round her wrist. She tore it off, prepared another and was patting it down the hinge side of the door when the inspection party appeared.

"And what's this?" said a voice in massacred French.

She turned round. She gave the two German officers a smile, nun-like, sweet and startled, as she asked her Superior, with humble lift of eyebrows, if she might have permission to speak. Mother Didyma nodded.


Austin Briggs

"We are fumigating, *meine Herren Offizieren*," she said in the perfect German that all her father's children had learned. "One of our most virulent cases." The two officers stepped back a pace. "But a happy death, thank God." She looked straight into the blue eyes of the senior officer.

"*Ein heiliger Tod!*" he repeated, amused. He clicked his booted heels and saluted her. "We are happy, *Schwester*, that you keep your rooms so clean of infection." He moved on.

Sister Luke bowed, then knelt to paste the final strips. She took a long time to do them, and she talked to God as she patted them into place. "I'm no longer one of Your obedient Brides," she said. "Yet You gave me fourteen years of the Holy Rule as armour for today, to save this one life."

Before she closed the crack she whispered through it, "Everything is in order. I'll come for you tomorrow before dawn."

Two raps answered her.

ONE DAY not long after this Lisa signalled with her eyes. Sister Luke glided out of the ward to the treatment-room to await her. The girl came in with a medication tray.

"The Germans are coming again tonight, Sister," she whispered. "I had a package of newspapers to distribute. I didn't know what to do. And so, Sister, since you have the night shift . . . I left the packet in your desk."

That night Sister Luke sat there and pretended that the forbidden newspapers were not in the second drawer to the left. She did all sorts of small things to keep herself from looking at them. But presently she opened the drawer, and glanced down at the packet of printed sheets. The lead story, dated June 23, 1940, stated that at six fifteen that day the French had signed peace terms with the Nazis. She pulled out a paper and read the whole story. She turned the sheet over, telling herself, "I've gone this far, I may as well finish, God help me." Her eyes caught a headline: *Murder in the Meuse*

It read at first like one of the wild reports she heard from refugees. Somewhere on the highways into France a Belgian refugee stream had been machine-gunned by Stukas. One of Belgium's renowned doctors who was in the bottleneck where traffic halted had refused to take to the

ditches until he had given first aid to the wounded. Then he had recited the prayers for the dead, standing there bareheaded in a field, looking straight up at the Stukas. When he started towards the ditches, the next wave of Stukas caught him. "We drew his body into the ditch and removed his rosette of the Order of Leopold. If his son, Antoine Van der Mal, will get in touch with us, we will deliver the ribbon."

Shock stiffened her. Tears rolled down her cheeks. She contained the storm of grief, letting no moan emerge. For a long time she sat there clutching the paper.

Then there was the flurry of the portress's slippers hurrying ahead of boots. She thrust the paper into the drawer.

"Two Germans, Sister . . inspecting the black-out . . . ."

The men of the Gestapo stood outside the office.

"Any other lights on this floor, Sister?"

She made a sign of three with her fingers and led them down the corridor. She held her clenched fists beneath her scapular as she walked beside them. Her coif cut off her face so that they did not see its storm of hate.

CHAPTER 9

After that, the years of the German occupation ran together like the print of the clandestine newspaper she tried to read in the dim light of the black-out Sister Luke was never sure afterwards just when she first visited the confessional to say that she no longer belonged in a convent. Her defeat had so many facets, she could not define it all at once, but only her scorching shame for wearing the garb of obedience while flouting the Holy Rule, and the Cross of Christ above a heart filled with hate.

"I can never learn to see Christ in a German, Father. This is only one of my faults. . . ."

With dogged regularity she visited her confessor. And, month after month, the Father counselled her to be prudent, to pray for strength.

She marvelled at the integrity of the sisterhood, which kept its Holy Rule alive in the midst of chaos. Her own prayers were arid. No grace came to guide her tormented conscience. She understood the silence between herself and God perfectly. God gave the grace to do His

commands, of which a major one was to love your enemy. Each time you failed, you took something from Him. He would return just so many times . . . then He would ask and give no more. It did not mean that He had ceased to love you, only that He was too sad to speak.

"Why don't you try to have a talk with your Superior, my child?" said the frail old chaplain.

Just once she tried to explain to Mother Didyma why, in these days of so much suffering, she was repeatedly late for meals and devotions when the bells caught her in the midst of a spiritual talk with a frightened patient. "It always seems like time stolen from souls, *ma Mère,* to break off so abruptly. . . ."

It was as if she had torn up the Holy Rule before Mother Didyma's narrowing eyes. The Superior talked scathingly of the spoiling the missions engendered in young, weak sisters: laxity in obedience, self-esteem masked as spiritual enterprise . . . . Sister Luke never went back again to try to open up her heart.

Black-out regulations were now so strict that Mother Didyma appointed Sister Alberta as "black-out nun" to see that every blind in the hospital was pulled down at sunset.

The blinds were of black paper which showed wear after the first year. The nuns kept them hung together with safety-pins and adhesive tape; but one night, a crack of light showed through. As punishment, Sister Alberta was commanded by the Nazis to appear each morning thereafter for one month, at five o'clock, to roll up every black-out blind in their headquarters, a confiscated château with ninety windows, a good half-hour walk from the convent.

Sister Luke raged inwardly when she heard the little nun rising at four in the morning to go forth like a janitress. The fact that Sister Alberta uttered no complaint, but shouldered her humiliating task with a smile of utmost sweetness, only increased Sister Luke's fury and showed her again what irreconcilable differences lay between her and her sisters. "You must pray, Sister . . . pray God to deliver you from revenge in the heart," her confessor said sadly.

But not long after, a Prussian war nurse was brought to the hospital with a shrapnel hole in her lung. Sister Luke had heard of these Nazi nurses who roamed the front lines and sorted out their own wounded under fire.

Little Sister Alberta accompanied the stretcher to the tuberculosis floor, her sweet face clouded with compassionate concern. "She'll need a transfusion at once, Sister. I offer my blood if it matches."

Sister Luke looked at her, worn to candle thinness by hunger and her tour of punishment duty at Nazi headquarters. She turned up the Wehrmacht identification tag that gave name, age and blood type. "If the doctor orders transfusion, it will be *my* blood, Sister Alberta."

The eyelids of the Nazi nurse snapped open. "There will be no transfusion, do you hear?" she said in harsh precise French. "I would rather die than have mongrel Belgian blood in my veins."

Sister Luke watched the German fight for her life for two days. The doctor offered to seek a matching blood among the German officers in the town. The Nazi nurse informed him haughtily that German officers gave their blood only for the Fatherland.

"One cannot deny it, they have patriotism," Sister Luke said in the recreation. "I wish I could show my patriotism by dying as a martyr for my country."

Mother Didyma looked up "You can be a martyr every day," she said, "dying to yourself each day for love of God, without iron crosses as rewards."

The Nazi nurse died next day. Refusing opiates, she was conscious until the end. The hard blue eyes were wide open, gazing with scorn at the nuns bending over her when her breathing ceased.

Sister Luke felt a satisfaction that tormented her conscience. She prayed for forgiveness but felt no corresponding relief It was as though she addressed a friend too sad to reply.

"I was *glad* for that death, Father," she told the chaplain next day. "I rejoiced inwardly to see an enemy die. And in this habit, Father . . . ." She looked down at her hands knotted whitely together. Life-saving hands with no heart behind them, she thought bitterly. Hands that once I offered up to God as the best part of me. *And mine to You, O Lord . . . .*

"I'm asking you quite simply, Father, to lay my case before the Cardinal Christ will not abandon me if I go out. I have given too many cups of water in His name and He knows I would go on doing it, whether working for Him as a nun or as a war nurse."

"Perhaps," said the Father. "But how do you know you'd please God more in the world than you do here?"

"Because God hates a hypocrite," she replied very firmly.

"Wait a little more," he pleaded. "Make a novena to our Blessed Virgin. We all sin now and then, my child."

She watched him walk away, his delicate face pinched with hunger and piety, his thin hair floating like a war-worn halo about his head. *I'll wait a little, because you asked it I'll say a novena again. . . But nothing will happen. . . .*

Never once while she waited, growing tense with the strain, did the impulse to walk out overcome her. She wanted an official laicization which could stand as passport at least for her soul in its passage into the world Like all passports, it was hard to get.

In the beginning of 1944, the bombardments augmented in fury in preparation for D-Day. The sisters thought only of the safety of the patients. They toiled down the long stairways to the cellars with the stretcher cases and encouraged the ambulatory with little nods and smiles. Not one nun would have remained below during the raids had not Mother Didyma ordered her to.

Sometimes in the cellars Sister Luke reread the few letters she had received from her brothers Antoine, who had been captured in the fall of Namur, was in Norway, in a Nazi prison camp. The two younger were somewhere inside Belgium, unregistered, doing what they could to harass the occupation forces.

Often, too, she pondered her next talk with the chaplain, the sole intermediary between herself and the Cardinal, who had been given Papal power during the occupation to free a nun from her vows. No reasons she had given the chaplain so far seemed to satisfy him. They were probably common enough in the religious life in war-time—deliberate disobediences and failures when patriotism flared. Surely the chaplain had heard every one of them time and again from the serene sisters sitting with her under these low stone arches

There had to be something deeper to account for her own total despair: something that went down through flesh and bone into the marrow, that went back beyond the war years.

Then one day in early May of 1944, Reverend Mother Emmanuel came for her annual visit On the notice-board was a list of the nuns in the order they would be received for their private talks Sister Luke found

her name midway on the list. But this time she would not go to the Superior General. Casually, she said to Sister Frances, who preceded her on the list, "By the way, Sister, after your talk with the Reverend Mother tomorrow, would you please tell her that I give up my turn? I've really got nothing to say and why take up her time?"

Next morning she watched her nursing sisters slipping off duty one by one, their faces calm and composed. An inner voice mocked her. *Coward,* it said over and over.

Sister Frances returned from her talk and beckoned Sister Luke. "Reverend Mother wants to see you anyhow, Sister," she whispered. "She has something to ask you."

The Reverend Mother gave her the wondrous smile that disarmed completely. "Why didn't you come willingly, my child?" she asked. "Didn't you know I was aware of your struggles? Haven't you been praying and calling out for help?"

"Yes, Reverend Mother." Sister Luke looked into the dark eyes from which nothing could be hidden. "But I'm at the end of my struggles. I've been struggling for years." She hesitated. "For years . . . ."

Quite suddenly she saw her spiritual crisis clearly as the inevitable result of something that had lain in wait for her for years.

"In the beginning," she said, "each struggle seemed different. Then they began to repeat and I saw they all had the same core. Obedience, Reverend Mother. Obedience without question, instantaneous, perfect in its acceptance as Christ practised it. . . . My conscience asks questions, Reverend Mother." She paused.

"Continue, my child," said the Reverend Mother.

"There are times, Reverend Mother, when my conscience decides I must do something opposite to my Superior's wishes. You remember that tropical-medicine examination?" Sister Luke's voice rose one note. "How did I know that that suggestion did not come from you? I could not have failed . . . not even for you, Reverend Mother. My conscience could not have accepted such a hideous waste of time and mental effort, nor could I ever have persuaded myself that God would have wished it. There are scores of other examples through the years." She smiled bleakly. "And now I am late every day for chapel or refectory or both. I hear the bells but I can no longer cut short a talk with a patient who seems to need me. When I have night duty, I break the grand silence,

because that is the time when sometimes men in trouble want to talk about their souls. And then my reason begins to query the Rule most unanswerably. Why must God's helpers be struck dumb in the very hours when spirits seek to communicate?" She stopped abruptly on the word *communicate*. Sick with grief, she stared at what she had communicated.

Sorrow lay over the Gothic face bent towards her. After a long silence, the Reverend Mother Emmanuel said: "Are you going out, my child?"

"I think so, Reverend Mother."

The Reverend Mother gazed at her with an expression she would have turned her eyes away from had she been able. "Then I can give you only one piece of advice," she said. "Pray, Sister, and try to follow our Holy Rule step by step. Make one more effort for God . . . and for me as His instrument. I shall take you with me in my heart, and keep you each day in my prayers."

She traced the sign of the cross on Sister Luke's forehead with a thumb firm as a sculptor's. The film of tears in the Superior General's eyes magnified their pitch-black pupils and made them seem like two jet mirrors in which Sister Luke saw two very tiny nuns reflected whitely.

THE TWO tiny nuns Sister Luke had seen reflected in her Mother General's eyes mirrored her divided state. One part of her returned to the community and followed the Rule with scrupulous attention, obeyed the bells instantly, and cared for patients during the grand silence like a guardian angel endowed with every grace save that of speech. The other part waited for the last straw to fall on her burdened conscience—fearful lest it cut too short the decent waiting period she longed to render to her Mother General.

The last straw turned out to be food.

FROM THE start of the occupation, every patient had to bring his food-ration tickets when admitted to the hospital. Frequently, however, a patient came in saying he had spent all his food stamps. Then the needed extras came from the nuns' ration books. Sister Luke looked with admiration on the Procuratrice, who could do with an array of sugar, fat and meat coupons for a hospital of three hundred what only a female with the conscience of a nun could have achieved. Finally Mother Didyma

began to welcome German patients of rank sent to her by the local *Kommandatur* since it meant that often a pig or lamb was delivered to her for her overworked, hungry nuns. These Germans were often assigned to Sister Luke's wing, which had more private rooms than the others.

Sister Luke tried not to see her labours for God in terms of food but, though she knew the reason for Mother Didyma's action, the meat the conquerors provided stuck in her throat.

The final straw was added when she had to receive the so-called fiancée of a high-ranking German He was a lean fair officer with grey eyes that fixed her like polished bayonets while he told her, in daring worldly terms, that he was leaving the treasure of his life in her hands. The treasure was a Mademoiselle Jeanne, a Frenchwoman who received special luxuries in return for the petty information she supplied to her Gestapo lover

From the moment Mademoiselle Jeanne was received as a patient, lamb and pork from Belgian farms, butter from Denmark and cheese from Holland began appearing on patients' trays. For the first time for years, Mother Didyma looked relaxed, but the price of the unrationed windfall was service to a spoilt darling of the French upper crust who was a traitor to her country. After the first night the Frenchwoman demanded of the Superior that a nun sleep in her room, and Sister Luke was appointed.

She moved a cot and screen into the room of the perfectly healthy Frenchwoman whose German protector, she was certain, had placed her in the convent hospital for safekeeping simply because he could not trust her. Petulant and bored, Mademoiselle Jeanne spent her days thinking up special services to add to the burden of the nuns, whom she obviously despised, and her nights trying to make Sister Luke talk.

"Are the sisters afraid of the Germans?" she would ask.

"This is not important for your soul or your body, Mademoiselle I am in the grand silence. Call me if you really need me. . . ."

"Then you don't reply to my question because you don't wish to admit that they are. . . ."

And Sister Luke would lie awake trembling with fury, even wishing for an air raid so she could bundle her patient into the cellars to have a look at absolute fearlessness in action.

One morning Mademoiselle Jeanne insisted that her gruel was not strained to its usual consistency of velvet-smooth cream. She sent it back down three flights of stairs to the kitchens, and then moaned her complaints to her lover over the telephone.

Sister Luke had had enough. She snatched the receiver from her patient and told him exactly what she thought in unflattering detail. She heard him laugh, great peals of merriment. A side of beef was delivered to the convent that same afternoon, ticketed with her name

The high whine of death flying over Belgium in the form of jet-propelled rocket bombs aimed for Britain seemed to explain to her sisters, aware of her concern with the war, the look of death that day on Sister Luke's face. The next morning she went to the chaplain's office "I'm only a food stamp now, Father," she said. "If you have not written to the Cardinal, and have no intention of doing so—you must forgive me, Father, but I shall have to leave without permission. I have come to a place . . . ."

She was too exhausted even to try to tell him of the troubles she had laid at the foot of the altar that morning at Mass, or that once again she had denied herself communion—the only food that counted. As her sisters knelt at the rail, she had buried her face in her hands and tasted the bitter salt of her tears.

"I have come to a place," she repeated to the chaplain

"Are you sure, Sister, that this won't be a scandal for the young nurses who followed you into the convent? There have been quite a few." He delivered his last shot wistfully

"If any of my students entered the convent out of admiration for a nun instead of for love of God, I should be the first to tell them to leave Father, I beg you to write that letter."

"Very well, Sister. I see your mind is made up. We priests can only listen, pray and advise." He gave her a rueful smile. "In the end, the final resolution lies between the soul and the Blessed Lord. I shall tell the Cardinal that I see no cause why your petition should not be granted."

THE GERMAN officer came to remove Mademoiselle Jeanne a week later. Sister Luke heard him speaking English with one of her British sisters on the way up to her ward. "A flawless diction," the sister said afterwards. "Had I been blindfold, I'd have said Oxford."

He brought the Frenchwoman a coat of Russian sable and a box of candied violets from Paris. "One has to wheedle her to get her to the Bavarian Alps," he said to Sister Luke, as he picked up the woman's bags.

Sister Luke's eyes widened at the sight of a Nazi officer carrying luggage instead of summoning her to the task. "Perhaps I'll be seeing you again, Sister," he said.

He thrust a roll of currency into her hands as he went out. She counted it before turning it over to the Superior, and between two bills she found a small note: *If you come out, go at once to . . .* and there was a Brussels address.

All that day she tried to put two and two together. Not even the underground knew her intention of leaving the convent. The underground, she thought . . . and then she remembered Lisa.

After her final plea to the chaplain, she had gone to the students' dormitory for a talk with Lisa. She knew that in Lisa's eyes she seemed a corner-stone of monastic security and that the girl had talked of taking the veil. It had cost her nearly all her remaining courage to stand before Lisa and say, "I'm going out." And it had cost her her last ounce of control not to embrace her student when Lisa had assured her that it was not through admiring emulation of a sister that she wished to give her life to God.

"I've watched so many men die in fear, without faith, Sister," she said. "It seems to me that only in the cloister is there any faith left on earth. It's God's underground in a sense."

It must have been Lisa who conveyed her secret to the German officer, she thought now. "To the German," she told herself, "who is not a German but an Englishman and connected somehow with our underground." As she had prayed that her confession to Lisa would not disturb the girl's intention to enter the convent, and had had that prayer granted, so now she prayed for the safety of the grey-eyed Englishman.

She kept her note beneath her scapular. I have this, she thought, and my hair . . . hair enough since that dispensation when I chose to let mine grow.

Sometimes, in the shower, she ran her fingers through her new short hair. Were there any grey streaks yet? When you were past thirty-five, you couldn't be sure.

THE WAIT for the reply from the Cardinal seemed endless. Sister Luke tried in vain to recall if she had ever heard a whisper of how secularization was accomplished It was that grey middle place, somewhere between the signing of the papers and the removal of the religious habit, that gave the taste of death when she thought about it. Not the tender memorial deaths inside the cloister, but something sudden and absolute.

On a day in early August her uncertainty ended. As soon as she entered the chapel and faced her Superior for the bow, she knew that her papers had been received Mother Didyma knelt at her *prie-dieu* with hands clasped so tightly the knuckles were white. Sister Luke suspected that she had been weeping, and was now struggling for poise after learning that she had lost a soul from her community A rush of sisterly sympathy for the glacial Superior turned her meditation into a soliloquy. "I wish I had told you beforehand, *ma Mère*. . . . I chose the way of the confessional instead of through you. . . ."

A strange peace flooded her soul during the Mass, and when she looked inward at the place where anger had burned and gladness for deaths of the enemy, there was nothing but the silvery quiet of ash She went then to the communion rail. I'm not leaving the Church—only you, my sisters, and our Holy Rule that I am not strong enough to conform to . . . remember this and feel no slight or sorrow. Then she prayed.

Mother Didyma headed the procession out of the chapel. She waited in the hall until all the nuns were assembled. Then she said, "After breakfast, the sisters may convene in the chapter hall to say adieu to Sister Luke, who is going to Antwerp." Her eyes sought Sister Luke. "And you, Sister, will please come to my office immediately after."

The farewells in the chapter hall were brief, and poignant because two of the nuns had guessed her intention and showed anguish in their eyes as they embraced her. One whispered, "Have you thought of your black boys waiting for you in the Congo?" Nineteen times she felt a smooth cheek laid against her own and smelt the sweetness of soap and starch. She gave them her smile from her heart, then went out of the door without looking back.

The next steps were towards the Superior's office. Mother Didyma sat behind her desk. Confronted by an accomplished fact, she wasted no words.

"Sister, I must ask you to read this paper very carefully. There are

three copies—one for you, one for us and one for the Papal archives. Once you place your signature upon it, you are no longer a member of the congregation." Stonily, the Superior handed her one of the papers.

The seal printed on the letterhead was a Cardinal's flat hat. *To Sister Luke,* she read, *in the world Gabrielle Van der Mal. Upon your request, by Apostolic authority delegated to Us* . . . the lines began to swim together . . . *We relieve you from the bond of your vows . . . declare you reduced to secular state . . . under the following conditions* . . . .

She must formally accept the letters of secularization. She must take off the habit of religion and never put it on again. She must agree never to request anything from the congregation for services rendered. *In full liberty and after mature deliberation* . . . . She looked up.

Something had happened to Mother Didyma's face. Beneath the glacial surface a hidden spring was trying to break through.

"Is there nothing, Sister, that we can do?" she asked.

"Nothing, *ma Mère.*"

"You would not consider having one more talk with the Reverend Mother Emmanuel before signing?"

"No, *ma Mère* . . . it could bring only pain to both of us. . . ." The pain showed in her face, she was sure. She had to wait a moment until her voice steadied. "Because my decision is irrevocable."

Was it that irrevocable word *irrevocable* that made Mother Didyma stiffen again? Or was it the emotion she herself had betrayed when she spoke of the great lonely woman whom she had not the courage to face? She saw the ice close over as Mother Didyma handed her a pen. Afterwards, she believed that the ice came to strengthen the Superior for what she had to do next. "This is your copy," said Mother Didyma brusquely. "From this office you will go directly to our affiliated house in Rue Grande." The Superior fumbled in her desk as she spoke. She brought forth four notes of five hundred francs each and held them out for Sister Luke to take. "And there is this in conclusion," she said.

Sister Luke stared at the notes, which added up exactly to the token dowry her father had brought to the congregation seventeen years before.

For an instant she couldn't move. She tried in vain to voice her thoughts. Must I take it? The congregation owes me nothing, nothing. The debt is all on my side and will be for ever. Some maniac cried from within: *Tear it up and throw it back.* . . .

Then she put forth her hand and accepted the money. It was her last act of humility in the convent and the most total humiliation she had ever experienced. The bitter pain of having to end her life in Christ with a money transaction overrode all other feeling and thought, and she was unaware that the Superior was leading the way out, not through the cloister where she now no longer had the right to walk, but through the public foyer to the main door of the hospital. She didn't even notice that the customary embrace at the door was not given. The blow to her pride carried her out of the convent as if anæsthetized.

And, in a way, it prepared her for the final step.

There was a fifteen-minute walk to the affiliated house, which was a small boarding-school for girls. She walked swiftly, saying over and over to herself, *And there is this in conclusion . . . .*

The old nun in the porter's lodge at the school nodded from her cubicle.

"Go to room twelve," she said. "Everything is ready. Press the button when you are dressed and I will open."

The room was small and it had two doors. An unshaded electric light hung over the only furnishing—a table with clothing folded upon it. There was a navy-blue suit, two white blouses, two sets of underwear and two pairs of newly repaired shoes. On top of the underwear pile was the short black veil edged with white which Belgian nurses wore, and the unused portion of her current book of food stamps. A worn papier-mâché suit-case stood beside the clothes.

She raised her hands and removed her veil. Piece by piece as she took them off, she folded the nun's clothes in the traditional way with the starched coif laid atop like a white shell. She stripped to the skin and then stood a moment looking at the two doors, the one through which she had entered and the one through which she would leave. You come in as a nun and go out as a civilian. No human eye records the transformation, not even your own since there are no mirrors.

She shivered and began to put on the rayon underwear. It felt so light and scant, she had the impression that something must be missing. She paused over the white blouses that were not quite identical in cut. It confused her to have a choice. What young woman entering the convent had left the blue suit behind, and in what year? The sleeves of the jacket were too long.

When she had everything packed that was not on her back, she stood the stout nun's shoes a little farther away from the folded clothing and fought down a lump in her throat as she looked at the toes misshapen from the press of praying.

If nuns were not practised in daily dying, she thought, all this would be quite difficult. She picked up the nurse's short veil. There was a small safety-pin in the hem of it. The sight of that pin brought the first tears. We have thought of everything, it seemed to say. There is nothing for which you need ring to summon a sister to see you as you are now. Even as we protected you during all your years from the distressing sight of one going out.

She pulled the short veil tightly over her unkempt crop of hair and pinned it closely at the nape of her neck. From her pocket she took the note that the Englishman had given her. She memorized the Brussels address, then tore the note into tiny shreds which even a nun could not have put together again and dropped the confetti into one of the shoes on the table, there being no waste-basket in the room. Then she pressed the button set into an enamelled plaque that said *Out*.

She watched the wire rope that ran along under the ceiling between the doors. As it tightened, she murmured, "O God, You've permitted me to come this far . . . stay near me now for the rest of the way. . . ." The exit door clicked and swung open. She picked up her suit-case, pulled once again at the short skirt, and walked out into the world.

THE WORLD was a narrow cobbled street with early morning sun slanting across it. At the far end, the street ran into a square where a corner café was opening for the day.

The waiter there eyed her nurse's veil and served her promptly. "You've probably been up all night delivering a soul into this troubled world, Mademoiselle," he said.

"But yes . . . ." She returned his smile shyly. "Yes, I have."

The waiter's instant acceptance of her as a nurse turned her thoughts to the lay veil the convent had given her. They could have given me a hat in exchange for the one I wore when I went in, she thought, since everything else was such an exact return. The single exception the convent had made, which proclaimed to the world she was a fully qualified nurse, was the gleam of charity she had sought behind the shocking

chill of the final rendering. Seeing that gleam made all the difference. When she looked up, the square was lively with motion and brightness.

Without the protecting coif, she seemed to be looking at the world through wide-angle lenses A tram bustled into the square, and bustled out again · by moving only her eyes she could follow the people who got off, fumbled in their pockets for keys as they approached their places of business, opened up and went in.

An old farmer with a string bag of endives over his shoulder chose the table next to hers. He glanced at her suit-case and smiled.

"We've got God's plenty of time to kill before the Brussels train departs," he said congenially. She smiled back at him but could think of nothing to say.

The habit of silence, she reflected, of abjuring trivial talk, was just one of the many tell-tale disciplines she must learn to relax. She could not know that her nun's inner formation was a Gibraltar that would never be levelled. The ingrained habits of acting with charity and justice, with selflessness and sincerity, were to stamp her always in her nursing career, and make her seem to future colleagues like some sort of enchanting revolutionary who practised a way of life quite new and unheard of.

There was a high eerie whine and a thin white streak cut across the blue sky. It gave her an emotion to see her first V-1 going over. She had heard them often in the convent but had never gone to the window to look.

She did not know that, in just eight weeks, the V-1 warfare was to be loosed on her liberated country. She would be in Antwerp, in the uniform of a British army medical unit, worrying then no more about her nun's way of walking and talking. She would be thinking only of the bodies that might still be breathing in the traps of rubble through which she crawled. The Belgian underground was recruiting nurses for that medical corps even as she sat in the little café wondering what the mysterious Brussels address was going to mean to her.

She looked out again over the square, and saw two Germans in slick high officers' boots stop a workman, look at his papers, nod and pass on.

"I must go now," she said to the farmer. She added politely, trivially, "Good profit on the endives, Monsieur."

Then she picked up her suit-case and walked with the nun's imperceptible speed to a department store across the square. A salesgirl directed

her to the photography booths on the mezzanine. She sat on a revolving stool before the mirrors and looked at herself for the first time for nearly two decades. The face seemed surprisingly young beneath the bandanna-like veil. One lock of hair escaped from the front and stood straight up above the analytical blue eyes.

"It's not yet grey," she said to the mirrored reflection of a civilian nurse. She sat perfectly still while she put coins in the slot and pressed the button. Lights flew on and there was a click and a whirring. She stayed in the curtained booth, staring at herself, while the photos developed.

There was one more step before she would be officially a registered civilian. Just what did one say to a Town-Hall clerk when presenting a nun's identity card to be exchanged for a civilian's? Would he look at her with that peculiar morbid interest you often saw in people's eyes when they talked about ex-nuns? As if, she thought, they were escapees from some sort of torture chamber that squeezed out every normal human yearning? *That's all they know of it,* she whispered to the civilian nurse watching her with steady eyes in the mirror.

And suddenly she heard the *Capitulum* of Sext: *And I take root in an honourable people and in the portion of my God His inheritance: and my abode is in the full assembly of saints* . . . and she knew without looking at her watch which Office her sisters were chanting at that moment. She imagined she could hear them lifting up their hearts all together for the *Deo Gratias.* Then the automatic camera whirred and a strip of photos shot into the metal trough.





Kathryn Hulme

WHEN Kathryn Hulme was working in Germany after the war, in a camp for displaced persons, she met a quiet-faced, beautiful young Belgian nurse—and, she says, "That is where *The Nun's Story* began for me Nuns had always fascinated me, stirred my emotions When I learned more of their life through that nurse —who had been Sister Luke—I wanted to share my discoveries, so opposite to everything I had imagined, and, if possible, to make other people feel the wonder and the heroism of the dedicated life "

Miss Hulme now lives in California, where she was born, but before the war she travelled widely in Africa, Asia and Europe, and has described her experiences in two novels and a book of travel sketches Her relief work after the war was also the source of a book. *The Wild Place,* a moving account of a camp for the homeless in Germany, which was published here in 1954

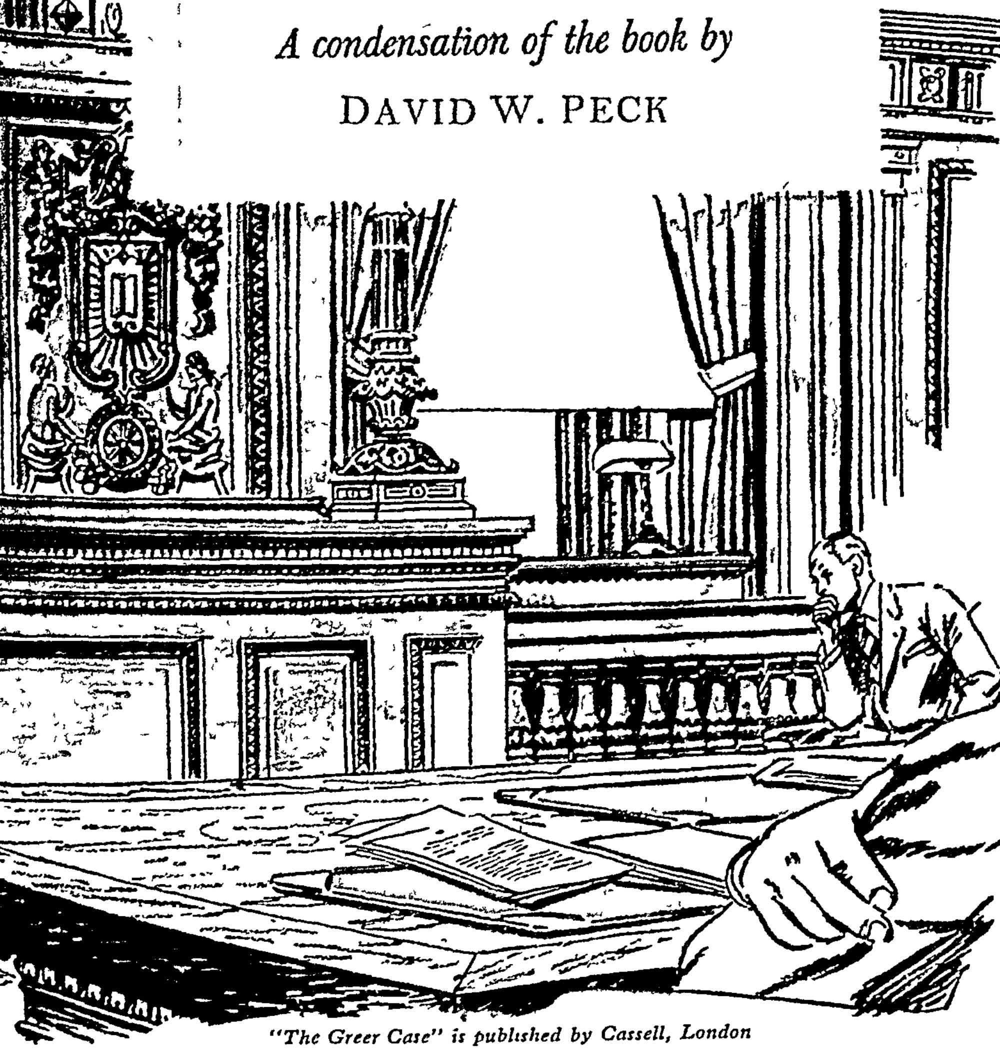


Illustrations by Philippe Charles

The GREER CASE

A condensation of the book by

DAVID W. PECK



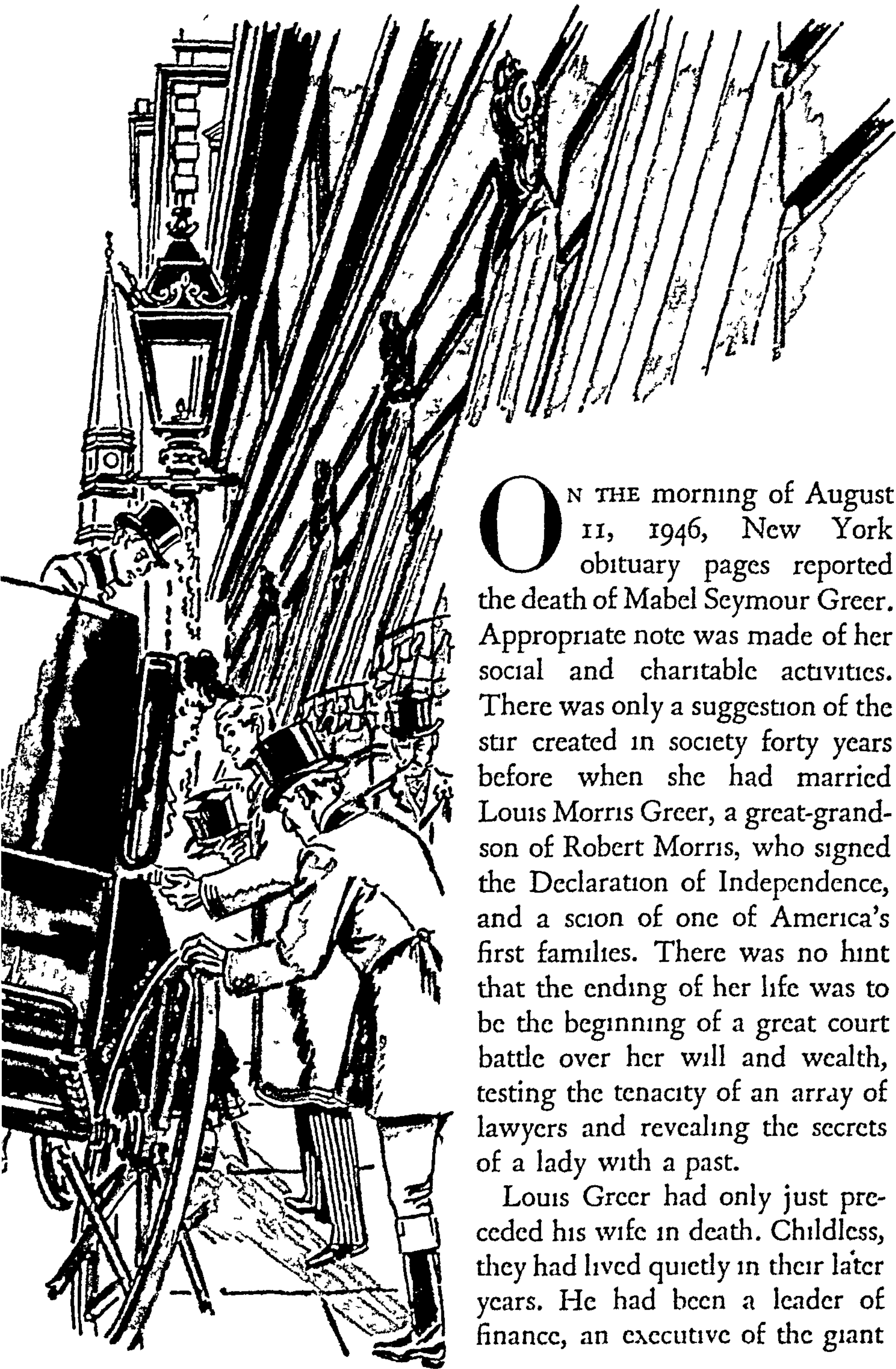
"The Greer Case" is published by Cassell, London

WAS Harold Segur indeed the son born out of wedlock whose existence wealthy, fashionable Mabel Seymour Greer felt compelled to reveal to her lawyer just before her death?

This true account of a famous law case—the contest of a will with a fortune at stake—has all the astonishing twists and turns of the drama that originally unfolded in the Surrogate's Court of New York County. As the shadowed past of a highly respected lady is exposed, more than a story of mystery and irony emerges: behind the court-room proceedings are apparent the energy and imagination of three brilliant lawyers, matching wits as they search out the evidence.

"Fascinating—and strictly true."

—*Manchester Evening News*



ON THE morning of August 11, 1946, New York obituary pages reported the death of Mabel Seymour Greer. Appropriate note was made of her social and charitable activities. There was only a suggestion of the stir created in society forty years before when she had married Louis Morris Greer, a great-grandson of Robert Morris, who signed the Declaration of Independence, and a scion of one of America's first families. There was no hint that the ending of her life was to be the beginning of a great court battle over her will and wealth, testing the tenacity of an array of lawyers and revealing the secrets of a lady with a past.

Louis Greer had only just preceded his wife in death. Childless, they had lived quietly in their later years. He had been a leader of finance, an executive of the giant

utility company which supplies the City of New York with gas and electricity. Mrs. Greer, a large-bosomed, white-haired woman, the image of Queen Victoria, had devoted herself to charity.

An older generation remembered Louis Greer as the exemplar of the elegant age, strolling in Fifth Avenue with his high hat and walking-stick. On such an occasion in the spring of 1908, he rescued two lovely ladies from the distress of a carriage drawn to the kerb with a broken wheel and invited them to Sherry's for tea One of the ladies was Mabel Seymour. She was remembered by those who attended the fashionable wedding that autumn as the girl who came from nowhere and snatched the prize; a girl with a perfectly proportioned figure, a cherubic face, alabaster skin, and a profusion of chestnut hair in a regal coil.

In the circle in which she was to move no one had known her prior to 1908. What Louis Greer learned of her lineage beyond what was stated in their application for a marriage licence is not known. A soft English accent confirmed a stated English birth. One would not have been inclined at the time to question her age, stated as twenty-seven.

Few who read her death notice that August morning of 1946 perceived any connection between it and another obituary that had appeared in a New York paper seven years earlier: the report of the death of Dr Willard B. Segur of Ware, Massachusetts, who for forty-two years had practised medicine in Ware and the neighbouring town of Enfield. He left surviving him his widow, a son, and an adopted son, Harold A. Segur of Worcester, Massachusetts

Unconnected as the lives and deaths of Mabel Greer and Dr. Segur seemed to be, they were vividly linked. Within one month after Mrs. Greer's death the newspapers reported that, just before her death, Mrs. Greer had acknowledged that an illegitimate son had been born to her and Dr. Segur, when they both were very young, and that Dr. Segur had adopted the child. This startling disclosure was made by Mrs. Greer's lawyer in a statement accompanying the filing of her will, which left her fortune to Harvard University, her husband's alma mater.

Soon followed the announcement that Dr. Segur's adopted son, Harold A. Segur, had brought legal action to upset Mrs. Greer's will and claim inheritance of her fortune. The executor of her estate conceded that she had borne a son by Dr. Segur but contested the claim of Harold Segur that he was the son.

A child had a legal right to half the estate. Two, this will might be upset on the ground that when it was made, during the last days of Mrs. Greer's life, she was not in full possession of her faculties and thus not competent to make a will, in which case Segur would be entitled to the entire estate. But the validity of the will was not the issue at this time. First, Segur would have to prove that he was Mrs Greer's son. That was the question of the day.

Across the counsel table three other lawyers sat in opposition. Raymond Armbruster had a dual responsibility. As the draftsman of Mrs. Greer's will and attorney for the Fifth Avenue Bank, the executor under the will, he had a duty to sustain the will and the bequests she had made. He likewise had a duty to disclose any information he possessed as to possible heirs and to see that the estate he represented was distributed according to law.

Armbruster knew that he was going to be embarrassed in this case. His own statement to the court, when he filed the will, disclosing the existence of a child and indicating that Harold A. Segur was that child, had been the start of the case. Now he was opposing Segur and would be a witness against him. As his own testimony would be an important part of the case, he had decided not to act as trial counsel for the executor but had retained Francis D. Wells of Coudert Brothers, who was seated beside him, for this purpose.

The third lawyer appearing in opposition to Segur was a lean, thoughtful-looking man seated behind Wells and Armbruster—Joseph A. Cox, counsel to the Public Administrator of New York County. The Public Administrator is the official charged with the responsibility of administering the estates of persons who die without leaving a valid will and without readily identifiable relatives. Also, if there is no relative closer than a cousin, he may challenge the validity of a will If the attack is successful the state takes the property. The Public Administrator's right to challenge Mrs. Greer's will therefore depended on defeating the claim of Segur.

"If your Honour please," Friedman began his opening statement, "Mabel Seymour Greer died in this city on August 10, 1946, leaving an estate of over $500,000, most of which she left to charity by a will which my learned friend, Mr. Armbruster, has offered for probate. The only

assumption upon which this will can stand is that Mrs. Greer left no child. Such an assumption is false.

"Mrs. Greer left a son. Not a publicly acknowledged son, because the son was not Mr. Greer's. Indeed, Mrs. Greer was at pains all during her married life to keep her secret from her husband. Nevertheless, she confided to a number of people, her household retainers and friends, that she had a child when she was a young girl and that the child was living. She described that child as having been born to her in Boston, the offspring of a liaison with a college student named Willard B Segur, who was taking medical courses at the time, and who later became a prominent doctor and adopted the child. That child, the adopted son of Dr. Segur, is here this day to claim his rightful inheritance."

With dramatic assurance, the claim of Harold A. Segur was thus set forth.

The Surrogate raised the first hurdle. Holding up a piece of paper which lay on the bench before him, he said, "By this paper, sir, your client has waived all claim to the Greer estate. What do you say to that?"

The lawyer was not to be daunted. "I am glad your Honour mentioned that. When Mr. Segur takes the witness stand, he will explain to your Honour the circumstances under which he was prevailed upon to sign that paper. the assurance of being spared the publicity which this case has visited upon him and his family. The assurance failed, and I am confident that your Honour will relieve him from the stipulation. The evidence will establish beyond question that Mrs Greer had a son by Dr. Segur, and I think we will be able to establish to your satisfaction that Harold Segur is that child. With your permission I will read the affidavit Mr. Armbruster presented to this court when he filed the will."

The lawyer then read from his adversary's statement: that Armbruster had been told by Mrs. Greer of the birth of a child out of wedlock in Boston and that the child had been adopted by his father, Willard B. Segur; that Armbruster had interviewed former employees and friends of Mrs. Greer who had confirmed the fact that Mrs. Greer had told them substantially the same story. The affidavit continued to the effect that Armbruster had gone to Worcester, Massachusetts, and had there located Harold A Segur, the adopted child of Dr. Segur, and concluded with this statement:

> I feel that Harold A. Segur is Mrs. Greer's son and is the person of whom she spoke, but I am not definitely certain of this fact nor do I have any documentary evidence to prove it. I thoroughly believe, from the investigations I have made, that Mrs. Greer had no living relatives other than the son of whom she spoke to me and to other people.

Letting the document drop on the table, Friedman lifted his eyes and voice. "Your Honour, while we cannot rest on the report made by Mr. Armbruster when he filed the will, we can and will prove that Harold Segur is Mrs. Greer's son. And now, if your Honour please, I will call our first witness, Mrs. Annie Jackson, who was Mrs. Greer's maid for twenty-five years."

A timid smile and a timid step were her response to the call of her name. Annie Jackson's place was in the home, and the good servant listened rather than talked. Although she had been subjected to many interviews by different lawyers, each trying to get a different meaning out of the same facts, she was still not used to their ways.

Friedman's questioning was as homely as he could make it as he gently led her through preliminary testimony which established that during her years with Mrs Greer she had been on intimate terms with her mistress. "Did Mrs. Greer ever tell you about her son?"

"She did," the witness acknowledged. "After I was with her about ten years she began to tell me about her son."

"Tell us what she said to you about her son at that time?"

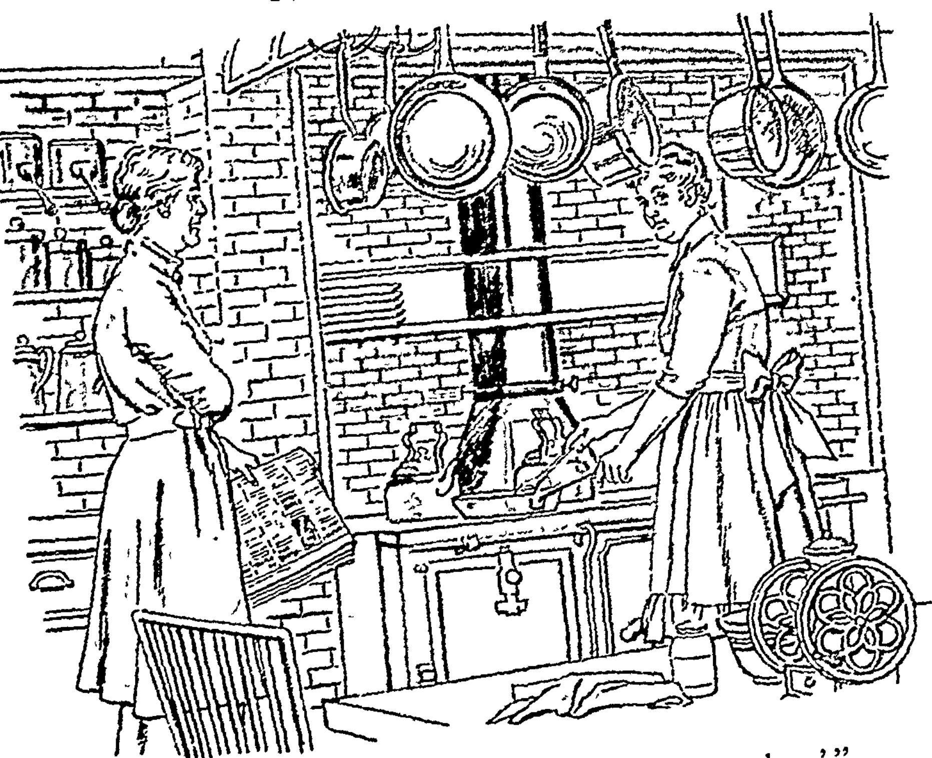
"She said that she had something to tell me, providing I didn't mention it for it to harm her. Then she told me this child had been born to her in her younger age and that the child had been left in a boarding-house in Boston, where it was born, and she had never returned to see it. Then she went on with the story—how she had wanted to see the child, but she had no money. She wanted to do something for the child, but after she married Mr. Greer she could not afford to have him find out, and that was the burden she had been carrying all the years."

"Did she ever tell you who the father of the child was?"

"She said that Dr. Segur was the father of the boy."

"Did she ever tell you that the boy had been adopted?"

"Yes. In 1939, when this doctor died and she saw the death notice in the paper, she came into the kitchen and showed it to me—she read it to me while I was getting the dinner—when she got to the part



about his leaving an adopted son, she said, 'That's my boy.'"

"You are talking now about the death notice of Dr. Willard Segur?"

"Yes. And she said, 'I thought that he would adopt it and I am happy that he did.'"

"After she had first spoken to you about her son, how often did Mrs. Greer speak to you about her son?"

"Well, almost every day she would say something."

Satisfied with this simple, straightforward presentation of his first witness, Friedman sat down. But before him on the table lay a photograph. He looked searchingly into the enigmatic beauty of that face, lost for the moment in contemplation. Then he rose again, saying, "One thing more, your Honour. May I ask Mrs. Jackson if she can identify the lady in this photograph?"

The witness took the photograph and replied, "Yes. That is Mrs. Greer in her wedding dress."

Francis D. Wells, representing the executor of the estate, admired

the brevity and simplicity of Friedman's presentation. It was well calculated to make the case seem A. B. C. It followed a logical sequence—Mrs. Greer had a son, the son was adopted by Dr. Segur, Harold Segur was Dr. Segur's adopted son, therefore Harold Segur was Mrs. Greer's son. His job was to destroy the simplicity and wreck the conclusion. With the premise that Mrs Greer had a son, he would not quarrel. Also, assuredly, Harold Segur was the adopted son of Dr. Segur, and Mrs. Greer may well have thought that the adopted son was her son. But Wells would attack this supposition, and he now lost no time in going to the attack.

Referring to the incident in 1939 when Mrs. Greer had read Dr. Segur's death notice with its mention of his adopted son, Wells said, "On your direct examination by Mr. Friedman, I believe you said that Mrs. Greer told you, 'That's my boy.' Is that right?"

"Yes; yes."

"But when I examined you some time ago, on a pre-trial examination, you testified that Mrs. Greer had said, 'That *must* be my boy.' Isn't that so, Annie?"

"Yes."

"Yes," Wells reiterated. "And is that the correct statement that Mrs. Greer made to you at that time?" the lawyer asked.

"I am trying to collect my thoughts. That wasn't yesterday," she said.

The best way it could be left, then, Wells decided, was by taking a lawyer's refuge in a witness's "best recollection." So he asked, "Is that the best recollection you have, Annie?"

"That is the best I have, yes," the woman conceded.

Pursuing his point—that Mrs. Greer did not identify her son with Harold Segur other than by supposing that Dr. Segur's adopted son was her own—Wells continued, "Did she ever furnish any name to you as the name of this child?"

"She always called him either 'Little Bill' or 'The Boy.'"

"Now, Annie," the lawyer continued, "did Mrs. Greer ever tell you who was present at the time the child was born in the Boston boarding-house?"

"Dr. Segur was present and the woman that owned the boarding-house."

Wells paused He was prepared to argue on the basis of her testimony

that all Mrs. Greer had said about the adoption was merely a deduction or rationalization from what she had read in the paper in 1939. It was notable to his mind that, although Mrs. Greer had told the witness of the birth and abandonment of the child long before, she had said nothing about an adoption until she read of the doctor's death and of his leaving an adopted child

One other thing now came to his mind, a story this faithful servant had told him of another conversation with Mrs Greer shortly before she died. He led the witness to tell of the circumstances of the exchange, and then asked, "Did she mention anything about a trip that she was going to take?"

"She said in September she hoped that she would be well enough to go to Boston to look, she said, 'for my boy.' "

"Did she say what she would do when she found him?"

"Well, she told me she wanted to see him and let him see her; and she wanted to do something for him, give him some money."

Wells sat down. The point, to him, was that Mrs. Greer to the end was thinking of her son as being in Boston, not Worcester, Harold Segur's home.

This line of questioning seemed promising to the third lawyer involved, Joseph Cox. With directness he asked the witness, "Did Mrs. Greer ever tell you where her boy lived?"

"Well, she didn't know where he lived."

"Subsequent to 1939, did Mrs. Greer ever tell you that she was trying to communicate with her boy?"

"No. I knew she was not, for the reason that she had the fear of Mr. Greer knowing, and she didn't try."

"After Mr. Greer's death, what did Mrs Greer tell you about the boy?"

"She wanted to see him. She wanted to go and look for him, and that was the one thought she had."

But she evidently didn't know where to find him, Cox thought, and that belied her professed belief that he was the adopted son of Dr. Segur.

Now, perhaps the witness could contribute something on the matter of age. Questions of age were going to haunt this case, Cox knew—Mrs Greer's age, her son's age, even the doctor's age when the child was born.

On her application for a marriage licence, made out in November 1908, Mabel Seymour had stated that she was twenty-seven and had been born in 1881 in Manchester, England, the daughter of a James Seymour and Charlotte Barnes. Diligent inquiry had been made in Manchester to verify this information but no record of her birth had been uncovered.

"After Mr. Greer's death did Mrs. Greer indicate to you how old her boy was or would be at that time?" Cox asked.

The answer indicated something about Mrs. Greer, but nothing about age:

"Mrs. Greer never talked much of age—never. Not her boy's age, nor her own age."

All information vital to the search for the son seemed to be buried in a past before the time that anyone living knew or could place Mrs. Greer. Here before the court now was her oldest retainer, servant, companion and confidante. What did she know of Mrs. Greer prior to her becoming Mrs. Greer?

"Did Mrs. Greer tell you what she was doing in Boston at the time of the birth of this child?" Cox inquired.

"No."

"Did she say anything about her life before she met Mr. Greer?"

"No."

Cox was finished. Friedman was prompted by the cross-examination to put only one further question before releasing the witness—the crucial question of age. He knew that, according to the age stated in her application for a marriage licence, Mrs. Greer would have been sixty-five at the time of her death, and that the opposition was going to argue that she had been only seven years old in 1888, the year Harold Segur was born. But he did not accept that record and was going to challenge it at every opportunity, and he could now get something from Mrs. Jackson as to her observations of Mrs Greer's apparent age.

"Mrs. Jackson," he said, "what in your opinion was the age of Mrs. Greer at the time of her death?"

"Well," the witness replied, "I would say that in my opinion she would be somewhere between seventy-three and seventy-four."

The lawyers were finished with the first witness. The judge made a gesture of dismissal and Annie Jackson stepped down.

FRIEDMAN's next witnesses were Dr. and Mrs. William J. Tierney. Dr. Tierney asserted his reluctance to testify on a topic he considered confidential as between physician and patient, but the judge was cuttingly short with him "There is no such rule of law, Doctor. There may be some aspects of a doctor's relation with his patient which are confidential, but not his total contacts with her. Answer the questions"

The doctor sat back and testified. Mrs. Greer, he said, was known as Mabel Seymour when he first met her. He continued a professional relationship with her after her marriage, and his wife and Mrs. Greer became very friendly and visited one another. A year or two after her marriage, Mrs. Greer told him that she had had a child and passed its care over to somebody else and had not seen the child since. She had described the father as a prominent doctor in Boston, but she had not named him.

Mrs. Tierney, who followed her husband on the stand, was much less reluctant to testify. She felt that the confidences she had received from her old friend over the years might shed some light on the mystery. Friedman asked, "Mrs. Tierney, did Mrs. Greer ever tell you that she had given birth to a son?"

"Yes." The lady settled in. "Mrs Greer called me up about fifteen years ago, and I knew she had been crying. I asked her what was wrong. She said, 'I want to tell you something and if I pick you up in the car, will you come over to the park?' So Frank—he was her chauffeur—brought us over to the park."

"What did Mrs. Greer tell you at that time?"

"Mrs. Greer said, 'I have a surprise for you I am terribly mixed up.' Then she said, 'I had a son born before I married Mr Greer,' and I asked, 'Were you married before?' She said, 'No,' and she started right on the story. She said, 'After the baby was born I went down and bought a christening robe. I insisted upon having the child baptized I saw to that.' Then she said the doctor wanted to keep the baby, but she didn't want to give it up, so she walked round Boston crying. She didn't have any money. Then she finally saw some church open, and she sat down in there to think things over and she found there was no way she could keep the child, so she gave it up to some woman there in Boston."

When Wells's turn came, he asked, "Did Mrs. Greer ever mention anything about an adoption of the child?"

"No."

"Did Mrs. Greer ever tell you that she had told the story to her chauffeur, Frank?"

"Yes About four years ago, Mrs. Greer came in to New York to see me, from the Piping Rock Club on Long Island, where she and Mr. Greer were staying. She was quite worked up. It seems that Mr. Greer was in the city that day and she was going for a ride. She got in the car and Frank handed her a card. He said, 'A gentleman gave me this card to give you.' When Mrs. Greer saw the name on it she almost fainted. She said, 'Frank, take me back to the club. We will pack up and leave straight away.' And they did, and when they were coming home Mrs. Greer almost collapsed She said, 'Frank, stop—I can't go any farther.' Then Frank said, 'What's the matter with you?' and she told Frank about her son."

"Did she tell you what name appeared on the card?"

"No, she didn't"

"Continue, please."

"So then she—of course, she was in a terrible way—she was crying and carrying on. I told her that she would have to stop thinking about it and pick herself up because she had to go home and face Mr. Greer. So she took my advice and went home, and then she telephoned me that night. She said, 'I was fine all through dinner.'"

THE ONLY fresh line of testimony introduced by Mrs. Tierney was the Piping Rock Club incident The following witness, however, had a great deal of new information to place before the court. Witnesses can come in strange ways Jennie Sheppard came by letter. Out of the blue, an answer to prayer.

Lester Friedman was fully conscious of the weakness in his case. The most important link in his chain of proof was Dr. Segur's adoption of Mabel Seymour's child. And all that Friedman had to go on were statements made by Mrs Greer long after the event, when it was questionable whether she spoke from actual knowledge or mere supposition from what she read in Dr. Segur's obituary.

If there were someone somewhere who had known Mrs Greer at the time when her child had been adopted by Dr. Segur, that person would be elderly by now, probably an old lady who had lived round Boston in

the 1880's or 90's. But one couldn't just wander round Boston asking every old lady if she had known a person called Mabel Seymour fifty years ago.

Then one morning, when Friedman sat down at his desk, there was an unusual letter awaiting him. It was signed "Jennie Sheppard," and the address was in New York City.

The next day Jennie Sheppard sat opposite him at his desk, a woman well into her seventies, with strong features and snapping dark-brown eyes under straggling grey-white hair. The shabbiness of dress did not indicate poverty so much as lack of care about her appearance. She was not interested in money; she made that clear at the outset. She wanted nothing except to tell what she knew That she told volubly.

Friedman listened, questioned. Beyond the fact that the woman had lived in Worcester half a century before, there was no way to check her story Jennie Sheppard would have to be offered as a witness on her own. He hoped that she would carry conviction

"Mrs Sheppard," Friedman began, "do you know the lady in this photograph?"

Glancing at the photograph of Mrs. Greer in her wedding dress, the witness snapped out, "Mabel Seymour."

"When did you first meet Mabel Seymour?"

"My husband was coming in by train from Boston——"

Already Friedman was beginning to fear garrulousness He cut in, "When was that? How long ago?"

"It was Christmas Eve."

"How long ago?"

"Well, about fifty-two years ago."

"Where were you living at that time?"

"One ninety-two Chandler Street, Worcester, Massachusetts. It was Christmas Eve and my husband brought her. He said she was poor and she was looking for a place to live. He asked if I could make room for her, so I says, 'Bring her in.' "

The Sheppard family at that time, she said, consisted of her husband, herself and their two-year-old son, Mannie Mabel Seymour stayed with them until March.

"During the time that she was with you at your home, did Mabel Seymour do any work?" Friedman asked.

"Yes. She helped me with the housework. She was an adorable, well-behaved girl."

"Did Mabel Seymour ever tell you anything of her personal life?"

"Yes. She told me she had been going with a young man by the name of Willard Segur who was studying medicine in Boston. He had promised to marry her, and she had become the mother of his little boy."

"Did she tell you what had become of the boy?"

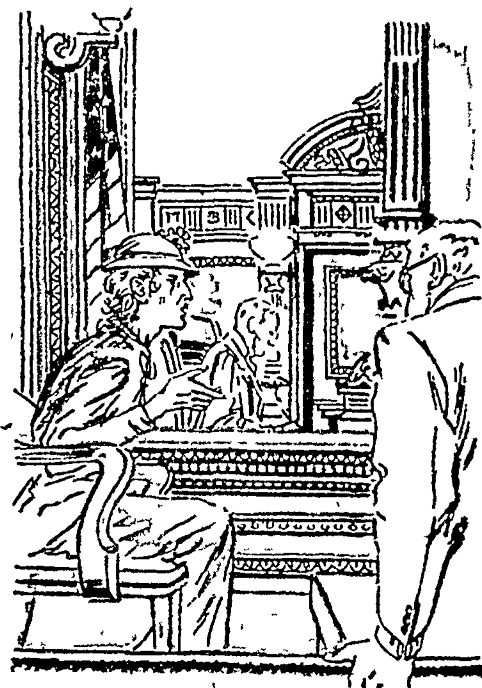
"She said that she put him in a safe place, something like a boarding-house, and that Willard Segur had an understanding with her; that in time he would take the boy out, like adopt him, and bring him up in his home."

All eyes were riveted on the witness.

"Did she tell you how old the boy was?"

"No. She told me that the boy was older than my boy."

"Do you remember when your boy Mannie was born?"



"Well, November will be fifty-five years."

"That means he was born in 1892. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Then when Mabel Seymour was in your home in Worcester, when Mannie was a little over two years old, that was in 1894?"

"Yes."

"Do you know how old Mabel Seymour was at that time?"

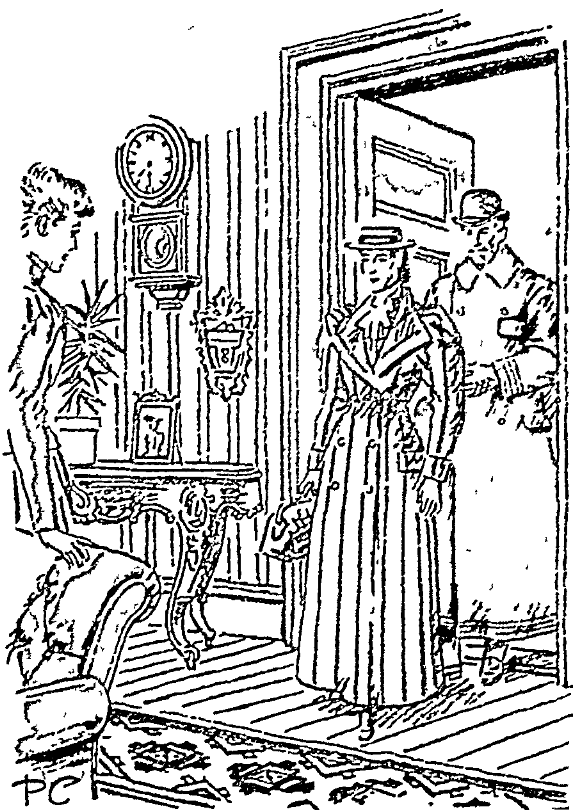
"Well, she looked to me like twenty-four or twenty-five. I didn't question her, because I thought she may not like it."

"Now, you say that Mabel

Seymour left your home in the early part of March of 1895. Did she tell you where she was going?"

"Yes. She said she was going to New York City to try and get a position, like at a hotel, a chambermaid."

"Did you see Mabel Seymour again after that?" The question was a signal of something even more portentous to come.



Only once, the old lady replied, fifteen years later. It was in Worcester when Mannie was seventeen years old. She placed the time by his having chicken-pox at the time. It was not at the same house which Mabel Seymour had visited before She came unannounced, saying that she had located Mrs. Sheppard through a friend in New York.

"Did you ask her about her life?" Friedman inquired

"Yes. I asked her how she was getting along. She told me she was very happy. She married a rich man and she was very happy, but she felt depressed for the boy. 'Mabel,' I says, 'do you ever see your little son?' She said, 'No.' She says Willard had made his promise good. He took him in his home and he is bringing him up. He adopted him right out."

There it was—a contemporary confirmation of the adoption indubitably pointing to Harold Segur as the son of Mrs. Greer. Friedman allowed it full effect before putting his next and last questions. "How long did she stay with you that second time?"

"She just came for the day. She took me to a department store, and

she bought me a dress. Then she left, but before she bade me good-bye, she gave me ten ten-dollar gold pieces—one hundred dollars altogether. She says, 'You were good to me. You gave me shelter. You threw your home open to me. Go home now, make a good supper.' "

"After Mabel Seymour left you that second time, you never saw her again?"

"No. I never seen her again."

Quietly Friedman retired to his seat, leaving a full court-room under the spell of the old woman's homely account of her last meeting with Mabel Seymour.

"May we have a short recess before cross-examination, your Honour?" Wells asked. "I should like to confer with Mr. Cox."

The request was granted and the two lawyers went into a huddle in the corridor.

"Is she telling the truth or is that story made out of whole cloth?"

"There isn't a word of truth in it, in my opinion," Wells answered. "She is a fanciful old woman and dreamed up that tale."

"But can you prove it?" Cox asked.

"There's only one way," replied Wells. "Her story is pat enough in outline, but can she fill in the details? You can't just make them up as you go along. We must not spare her. Give her a lot of rope, you know. That is the way."

Cox agreed, and the lawyers returned to their task.

"How many years ago was that, Mrs. Sheppard, that you first met Miss Seymour?" Wells began.

"Fifty-two years ago."

"What makes you so certain in your mind it was fifty-two years ago?"

"On account of my little boy's age."

"When was he born?"

"He was born November third."

"What year?"

"I never kept any remembrance of any years," the witness asserted with disdain.

"You can't remember the year?"

"No, I never kept it."

"You can remember how many years ago it was that you met Mrs. Greer but you can't remember the date when your son was born?"

"Oh, yes—the third of November."

"I am talking about the year, Mrs. Sheppard."

"I never—I didn't have the patience to write it down, but my boy knows in Worcester." For her that settled it.

Wells shifted. "Where were you born?" he asked.

"New York City."

"Give me the year, the date and the month."

"I think I was born in 1870."

"Do you recall what year you were married?"

"Yes. The first of April."

Wells raised his voice. "What year?"

"My mother had died and a week after that I got married," the witness rejoined. "She's dead fifty-seven years now."

"I am asking you to tell me what year." Wells spoke with accentuated distinctness.

"I told you," the old lady replied. "I never marked it down, but I do know I was married that long. All I know, it was April Fool that Sunday."

Wells retreated strategically to other ground. "How long have you known about this case?" he inquired.

"Oh, I have been reading the papers all the time, and when I seen the names Seymour and Segur, it all came back to me. So I sat down and I wrote a letter to Mr. Friedman."

"How did you get his name?"

"In the paper. I didn't know him and he didn't know me. I wrote him a very nice long interesting letter and then, when he got it, he thought it over."

"How do you know he thought it over?"

"He wanted to know if I am telling the truth."

Friedman, listening tensely, relaxed for a second at this spontaneous demonstration of good faith.

Wells was feeling his way. He had to admit that he had not yet found a soft spot in the testimony. The old woman had stood her ground, altogether composed.

"On that Christmas Eve fifty-two years ago, Mrs. Sheppard, weren't

you a little surprised to see a woman walking in with your husband?" Wells himself looked surprised.

"Why was I surprised? I trusted him," she shot back.

"Had you or your husband known this woman before she arrived there that night?"

"Never in his life. They got in conversation, you know, talking on the train. He pitied her because she looked pitiful."

What explanation had Mabel Seymour given for landing in Worcester? What had she been doing in Boston? What of her family? the lawyer asked. Nothing had been said on those subjects, the witness replied, except that Mabel had been doing some kind of work for which she got paid ten cents an hour.

"When she spoke to you, did you observe anything with regard to her accent?"

"There was a little accent there It could be like down East, you know, or like a little English accent, you know. Not much though."

"How much did this woman pay you for her room?"

"I wouldn't take a penny from her. I threw my home open to her. I didn't want no money. She said she would never forget me."

The lawyer eyed his quarry. "Did you ever throw your home open to anybody else before or after that incident?" he asked. "Just take them off the street?"

"Just that poor girl She was a nice, well-behaved girl."

"You didn't know it at the time?" he suggested.

"When she came to my home she was adorable. I liked her," the witness said firmly.

Wells looked at Cox. With unspoken understanding the one sat down and the other stood up The witness remained, ready for another encounter. Cox started tentatively, "When did you first read about this case in the newspapers?"

"I think it was January sometime I never keep a memory of anything I started reading and then I got very interested."

"Are you testifying that you don't have any memory of anything?" Cox asked challengingly.

Emphatically the woman replied, "Oh, I got memories."

"You said this girl seemed to be about twenty-four or twenty-five years of age?"

"I am not a good judge, but she looked that way to me."

"How old were you then?"

"I must have been her age, too."

"How old were you?" he repeated impatiently.

"Well, I got married at——"

"How old were you? Please!" His tone indicated exasperation.

"I guess about the same, because I am seventy-seven now."

"You don't know, do you?" the lawyer asked, as if the same observation might be made of all her statements.

"I told you I never remember any years or nothing like that," was the limited but final admission.

"She went away in March, you say. Where did she go?"

"To New York. I got a card she arrived safe."

"Have you got the card?"

"Oh, my God! If I had everything . . ." the woman ejaculated.

Cox did not allow the exclamation to deter him. "Did she ever write anything else, this girl that you befriended?"

"Nothing."

Cox eyed the old woman sternly and detected the first signs of fatigue. He decided to bear down. "Weren't you surprised after fifteen years to see this woman walk in?" he asked tauntingly.

"I was thunderstruck when I seen her."

"And it was then you learned she was married?"

"She told me she married a very rich man, that she was happily married."

"Did this girl tell you when she was married?"

"Yes—1908."

"You remember that?"

"Yes."

"What year were you married?"

"I don't remember that, because my marriage——"

The explanation got no further before the lawyer broke in, "You don't remember when you were married, do you?"

"My marriage paper got lost."

"But you remember when this girl got married?"

"Well, she told it to me," she explained.

"That is the only year that you remember?"

"She told me——"

Cox broke in again, "But anything that happened to you, your family, the only year you remember——"

"I ain't got the patience to keep all those things on my mind. I am old," she complained.

Ignoring the plea, the lawyer pressed on, "The only thing you remember is the year Mabel Seymour was married?"

"She was good to me. I will always love her."

"And you remember the year that she was married?"

"That is what she told me."

There was nothing more for either to say.

RAYMOND ARMBRUSTER did not like court proceedings. He preferred an office practice, getting the facts in ordinary ways, and dealing with people in a non-adversary relationship He was a sociable person—tall, tanned, good-looking and easy of manner. His friends were his clients, and his clients were his friends. Among both clients and friends for fifteen years had been Mr and Mrs Louis Morris Greer.

Friedman had called Armbruster as the claimant's witness, but he eyed the other attorney coldly as he questioned him about the conferences he had with Mrs Greer in preparation of the will. Friedman was particularly interested in the conference on June 3, 1946, for it was then, according to Armbruster's affidavit at the time the will was filed—Friedman intended to revert to that affidavit again and again—that Mrs. Greer had told Armbruster of her illegitimate son.

Consulting notes as he testified, Armbruster contributed the following new facts Mrs Greer, in her conversation with him, said that she was sixteen at the time she had gone to Boston; that she was studying music, that the baby was born in a private nursing home; that the doctors who delivered the child were Dr. Harvey Cushing and Dr. Derby, both of Boston; that the woman in charge of the home was Irish; and that the child, after adoption by the father, had been educated at Fieldstone Preparatory School and Dartmouth College.

Then Armbruster, at Friedman's request, identified the notes he had been using for future reference, and turned them over to the claimant's lawyer for perusal.

Now it was Wells's turn. In cross-examination he drew from

Armbruster the statement that Mrs. Greer did not tell him how she had learned of the adoption of her child by Dr. Segur other than by a reference to the 1939 obituary. Armbruster also testified for Wells that Frank Reitman, the Greers' former chauffeur, had been discussed in this June 3rd conversation, and Mrs. Greer had related to him the Piping Rock incident already referred to by Mrs. Tierney.

"In this conversation did Mrs. Greer identify the child by name?" Wells asked.

"She referred to the child as Willard Segur, Jr."

Wells then turned to a matter not dealt with by Friedman on direct examination—Armbruster's conversations with Harold Segur following Mrs. Greer's death.

Armbruster selected another set of notes from his portfolio and, placing them before him, told of two telephone conversations with Segur on August 14, 1946, and a visit to Segur's home in Worcester on August 15, 1946.

Over the telephone, according to Armbruster's testimony, Segur told him that his father, now dead, was Dr Willard Segur; that his mother was Mary Theresa O'Donnell, who had later married Dr. Segur; that he was born in Boston, had graduated from Dean Academy, and had attended Dartmouth College for one year. Segur also stated that he had never heard of or been at the Piping Rock Club in Locust Valley, New York.

When Armbruster visited Segur at his home in Worcester the following day, Segur told him, according to Armbruster's testimony, that he was born in the Lying-In Hospital in Boston on February 26, 1887. He had been adopted in 1901 on the petition of Dr Willard B Segur and Mary T. Segur. At that time his name was changed from Harold A. Baker to Harold A. Segur.

"I then inquired of Mr. Segur where the name 'Harold A. Baker' came from," Armbruster testified.

"What did he say to that?" Wells asked.

"Mr. Segur stated that he did not know, but a woman in Enfield, Massachusetts, where he grew up, had come from his adopted mother's home town, Provincetown, Massachusetts, and she had once told him that he was not the child of Mary Theresa O'Donnell, but that Mary O'Donnell had taken him at his birth for the purpose of blackmailing

one Harold A. Baker, who was a prominent citizen about Boston, and inducing him to marry her."

"What else was said at that point?"

"Mr. Segur then volunteered to show me a baby picture of himself, and produced one with the longhand writing on it 'Harry A. Baker, born February 26, 1888,' with the numeral '1' drawn through the numeral '2' making the date February 16, 1888. I then asked Mr. Segur why he had told me that he was born February 26, 1887, while here he had a photo of himself showing a date in 1888. Mr. Segur said, 'I might have been born on that date, but I presume that was the date the photo was taken.'"

"What else was said?"

"Mr. Segur then told me that his mother had told him that the doctor who brought him into this world was Dr. C. A. Cliff."

"Was anything further said on the subject of parentage?"

"Only that when Mary T Segur had died in 1927, he had been appointed administrator of her estate, and that he had hired at that time an attorney in Boston to make a search regarding his parentage; that the search had proved fruitless."

The nod now was from Wells to Cox. Cox, returning once again to Armbruster's conferences with Mrs. Greer in preparation of her will, was brief in his questioning.

"After your conversation with Mrs. Greer on June third, did you ever talk with her again about her son?"

"On August seventh, in the preparation of the will."

"What did she say on that occasion?"

"She stated that she did not wish this child to receive one red cent of her money."

On this abrupt but final note Cox sat down.

Friedman felt that the time had now come to go after the witness in his own way. Two things he wanted to accomplish. One was to discredit the chauffeur's story and the alleged appearance of Mrs. Greer's son. Now, with some expected co-operation from Armbruster, he undertook to lay the ghost of Piping Rock.

"Mr. Armbruster," he began, "do you recall my office associate, Miss Lilian Weinberg, calling to see you?"

"I do."

"Do you recall telling Miss Weinberg at that time that you felt that Frank Reitman, the chauffeur, was blackmailing Mrs Greer?"

"I don't recall my exact words. I may have said I felt that way."

The witness was obviously being cautious, but the impression given was clear enough to serve Friedman's purpose. He was prepared to argue that Mrs. Greer had been sufficiently free in telling people about her illegitimate son that Reitman had got wind of it and made up the Piping Rock story to scare her

Friedman could now turn to his really important objective—to establish if he possibly could, because it was the mainspring of his case, that Mrs. Greer had learned of the adoption of her child by Dr. Segur prior to reading of his death in the newspaper. She had consistently stated that she had not heard from the child or its father since leaving the child with the woman who ran the boarding-house or nursing home. Then how could she have learned of the adoption? That was a question which the judge would surely ask.

Friedman felt that he had found the answer to this all-important question, the key to the riddle, in Armbruster's notes which he had just been studying, and in the affidavit filed with Mrs. Greer's will.

"Mr. Armbruster, do you recall testifying for Mr. Wells this morning that Mrs. Greer did not tell you how she learned of the adoption of her son?"

"I do."

"Permit me then," Friedman said acidly, "to refer you to your notes of your June 3rd conversation with Mrs Greer. 'She kept in touch with the lady in charge of the nursing home and learned that the child was adopted by its father, Willard Segur.' Did you write that?"

"Yes."

"And you state that Mrs. Greer did not tell you from whom she learned of the adoption of her son?"

"I do."

Friedman appeared incredulous. "Do you understand what I am asking you, sir?"

The witness was definite. "I do, and I am positive that she never told me that."

The judge had followed this exchange intently, fully sensitive to its import, and felt impelled to make inquiry.

"Did Mrs. Greer say something which led you to make that note?"

"No, she did not, sir," the witness replied. "That is the way I wrote it down hurriedly, after I returned to my office."

"Did you write something in your memorandum respecting a matter which Mrs. Greer did not discuss with you?"

"No, I did not. She merely mentioned to me that she kept in touch with the lady in charge of the nursing home. Then later she told me she learned that the child had been adopted by its father and had been named Willard Segur, Jr."

"Is this person whom your note describes as the lady in charge of the nursing home the same person whom you have referred to as the 'Irish lady'?"

"Yes, sir."

Friedman was pleased with his excursion into Armbruster's notes, the more so as the judge had taken a hand in the questioning and pressed the witness

But he had not finished; there was another trump to play. He returned to his favourite card, the Armbruster affidavit submitted to the court when the will was filed.

"Now, Mr Armbruster," he said, "I will read to you from your affidavit sworn to September 5, 1946, wherein you state: 'Mrs. Greer had communicated with the person who ran the home at Boston and learned that the child was later adopted by his father, Willard B Segur. Later she read of the death of Dr Segur in the New York newspaper.' Is that statement correct?"

"It is not correct that she learned from the lady in charge of the nursing home," Armbruster replied precisely.

"In other words," Friedman said triumphantly, "the affidavit is not correct?"

"The affidavit is correct," came the measured reply. "I meant that she kept in touch with the lady in charge of the nursing home; that later she learned of the adoption, but not from the lady in the nursing home."

"I see," Friedman said dryly. "That is *your* interpretation of the statement made in your affidavit?"

"That is the way I intended it to be interpreted," the witness said calmly.

FRIEDMAN had arranged the presentation of his evidence so that practically all his proof would be in before he called Harold Segur to the stand. He had only one more witness to present now before the appearance of the claimant.

Erika Segnitz's testimony was brief. A statuesque blonde with a decided German accent, she told the court she had known Mrs. Greer since 1930 and they had been close friends. One day in 1936, she said, Mrs Greer had told her of her illegitimate son who had been adopted by the father, Willard Segur. She placed the date of this conversation with reference to a conference that same day with her attorney about her application for citizenship, and also with reference to her marriage, which had taken place in 1936 only shortly before. She was definitely sure, she said, that Mrs Greer, in subsequent conversations, had referred to the child as "my son Harry." And in response to a question by Friedman, Erika Segnitz stated that Mrs. Greer appeared to be sixty years old in 1930, which would have made it altogether possible for her to have had a child in 1887 or 1888.

FRIEDMAN had now shored up the foundation of his case—Mrs. Greer's identification, prior to 1939, of her child as the adopted son of Dr. Segur.

Friedman knew that there was little Segur could add in support of his position except his honest countenance and manner, and the sympathy engendered by the way he had been drawn into the proceedings. For he had been told that if he would sign a waiver of any claim there would be no publicity. The family had little of worldly goods, but they had built in quiet respectability a good home and a good name. In the faces of his four sons and in the thoughts of his wife the answer was clear. He signed.

Then it all broke in blaring headlines, violating all that his love and sacrifice had sought to protect.

So Segur was here with full justification and no little determination. As he had said to a reporter:

> Now that all this has become public, I have every intention of fighting for and obtaining for myself what is justly and legally due. Besides, I have a family of my own to think about. Up to now it was the thought of my wife and four grown boys that prevented me from coming out into the open and proclaiming myself the illegitimate son of

Mrs. Greer. Now that the whole world knows it, I will have no hesitation in claiming the inheritance that is due me.

The man who took the witness stand had a fine face, frank eyes that looked through silver-rimmed spectacles, grey hair and a well-modulated voice. He spoke softly and answered all questions simply and to the point.

As he sat in the witness chair he appeared to be about sixty years of age.

"Mr. Segur, what is your first recollection of your early childhood?" Friedman asked.

"My earliest recollection," Segur stated, "is living with my foster-mother, Mary Theresa O'Donnell, in Boston, in a sort of boarding-house where a lot of women lived. We all ate at the same table."

"Do you have any other recollection of your early childhood?"

"Yes. I can remember being taken by my foster mother to visit Dr. Segur in a hospital. My next recollection is moving to Enfield, Massachusetts, when my foster mother married Dr Segur in 1895."

The lawyer went directly to the question of age. "When were you born, Mr. Segur?"

"February 16, 1888," was the precise reply.

Friedman took from an envelope which he held in his hand a photograph, an ivory-tone print on pasteboard, the picture of a young child in a dress and high button shoes seated snugly on a fur rug. Segur identified it as a baby picture of himself There was written at the bottom of the picture, in a handwriting which he could not identify, the words "Harry A. Baker, born Feb. 26th, 1888" with a numeral "1" drawn through the "2" in 26th, making it "Feb 16th, 1888."

The lawyer then handed the witness a paper, the petition of Willard B. Segur and Mary T Segur, his wife, for the adoption of Harold Alfred Baker, described as a foundling of unknown parentage, born at the Boston Lying-In Hospital on February 16, 1887. The petition recited that the child had been taken at birth by Mary T. Segur and given her then married name, Baker, that he had since remained under her care and since her marriage under the joint care of Dr. and Mrs. Segur. The petition was dated July 18, 1901, and was signed by Willard B. Segur and Mary T. Segur, and at the bottom, after the printed legend—"I, the

child above named, being over the age of fourteen years, hereby consent to the adoption"—was signed in a schoolboy's hand, "Harold Alfred Baker."

"Mr. Segur," Friedman inquired, "is that your signature at the bottom of that paper?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Was that the first time you heard the name 'Baker' mentioned with respect to yourself?"

"It was, yes, sir."

"How old were you at that time?"

"Thirteen."

The judge asked for the paper. It was not difficult to read his thoughts. According to the adoption paper, Harold Segur was fourteen at the time of his adoption in 1901. Obviously Segur was now trying to get away from the birth date given in the adoption paper. And in this he was supported by the baby picture with its 1888 birth date. If Segur could now throw doubt on the veracity of the statement of his birth date in the adoption paper, he could equally challenge the correctness of the stated place of birth, the Boston Lying-In Hospital And that was important, for Mrs. Greer had consistently stated that her child was born in a boarding-house or nursing home, not in a hospital.

The judge felt that the documents deepened rather than lifted the mystery, for there were now four dates of birth to choose from: February 16, 1887, in the adoption paper, February 26, 1888, in the baby picture, corrected to February 16 (and what weight should be attached to this evidence that someone, presumably intent on accuracy, addressed himself to correcting the day but not the year?); and February 26, 1887, according to Armbruster's testimony of what Segur had told him.

But Friedman now went on to ask his client to tell of his living in Dr. Segur's household and of his attendance at high school, at boarding-school, from which he graduated in 1908, and for a year at Dartmouth. At each stage the lawyer inquired how old Segur then was and received a categorical answer in accord with an 1888 birth date.

In 1907, the witness said, Dr Segur and Mary T. Segur were divorced. Mrs. Segur left the house and he stayed with the doctor. He never saw his foster mother again. She passed away in 1927.

He told then of his employment, which since 1935 had been as Employment Manager of the Pullman Standard Car Manufacturing Company in Worcester. Friedman next had the witness relate the substance of his two telephone conversations with Armbruster, and then he asked him to describe his conversation with Armbruster at his home. Segur said that he had answered the lawyer's numerous questions about himself and his family until finally curiosity overcame him. "I asked him why he was asking all these questions without giving me any information. He told me that I had been very co-operative and that he would tell me the reason.

"He read a paper he took from his portfolio to the effect that Mrs. Greer about two months prior to her death had confided to him that when she was about sixteen years of age she had given birth to a boy in Boston and the father of that boy was Willard B Segur, a medical student, and that she had found out afterwards that Dr. Segur had adopted me. He then took a copy of Mrs. Greer's will and read part of it to me, then handed me the paper and told me I might read it if I wished. I glanced through the paper I didn't read it thoroughly. He stated to me that Mrs Greer had not mentioned me in her will because she felt that when Dr Segur died he was very prosperous and had amply taken care of me.

"He then told me that I, of course, had a right to contest the will, as an heir, but that it would involve tremendous expense, might take many years of court proceedings, and in the end I might not get anything He said that it would cause a lot of notoriety to myself and to my family, but that if I wished to sign a waiver releasing any claim to the estate, he would guarantee me there would be absolutely no publicity. On the strength of Mr. Armbruster's statement that there would be no publicity, I signed a waiver, although I told him at the time that I could certainly use the money, but I would do everything in the world to protect my family. Mr. Armbruster then produced two copies of waivers, and I signed my name to both copies.

"Mr. Armbruster then looked at me and said, 'I am perfectly satisfied that you are the right man, but the only question is the age of Mrs. Greer.' I asked him what he meant by the age of Mrs. Greer. He said she was reported to be sixty-five at the time of her death and couldn't have been my mother if that was her age. I reminded him that according

to what Mrs. Greer had told him, she was sixteen and Dr. Segur was a medical student when I was born, and I pointed out that Dr. Segur finished his medical courses in 1889, so if Mrs. Greer was sixteen at that time she was much older than sixty-five when she died."

The recital completed and the strain on memory eased, the witness seemed relieved. Friedman allowed him only a moment's respite, however, before resuming. The lawyer then drew from his client in rapid succession denials that he had told Armbruster that he was born in the Boston Lying-In Hospital or that he was born on February 26, 1887. He acknowledged having mentioned Dr. Cliff to Armbruster, but only as the doctor who had treated him as a child, not "brought him into the world." He had also spoken of a woman from Provincetown, but only as a person who had told him, when she learned of his adoption, that she was very pleased because she always knew that Mary Theresa O'Donnell was not his mother He denied that she had told him that the woman had taken him at birth for the purpose of blackmailing one Harold A. Baker.

"Did Mr. Armbruster speak to you or did you tell him anything regarding your living with the doctor after the doctor and Mrs. Segur were divorced?" the lawyer asked.

"I told Mr. Armbruster," the witness replied, "that at the time the doctor told me they were going to separate he said I was old enough to know my mind, whether I wished to go with her or stay with him. I told him that by all means I was going to stay with him. He said he was awfully glad that I had made that decision. He wanted me always to remember that blood was thicker than water."

After a pause to let the full force of this statement sink in, Friedman asked his last question. "Just one thing more, Mr. Segur. Do you know the nationality of Mary Segur?"

"Well, her name was Mary Theresa O'Donnell, and I know when she died she was buried from the Catholic Church. I am pretty sure she was of Irish extraction"

Wells, as he took up the cross-examination, felt no antagonism for Segur and had no desire to give him a raking examination. He liked and even admired the man whose claim he was opposing. Segur was no impostor faking a claim. But having undertaken to prove his claim, he

had, Wells thought, been carried away with a growing enthusiasm and was inclined to remember only the facts favourable to his case As for the contradictions between Segur and Armbruster, Wells thought the judge would be more impressed with Armbruster's testimony from notes made at the time of the conversations than by Segur's denials, made considerably later and after reflection.

He first forced Segur to admit that no one had actually told him that the baby picture, discovered among the doctor's papers after his death, was one of himself. He then led him on to testify that he could not explain why Dr. Segur had entered his birth date as February 16, 1887, on the adoption paper, if, as he claimed, the actual date of his birth was February 16, 1888.

Now Wells was ready to spread his net. He turned the questioning to the subject of an investigation concerning Harold Segur's parentage by a Boston lawyer in 1927 after the death of Segur's foster mother. The lawyer, Henry Wise, had previously represented Mary Segur. Under questioning Segur acknowledged that Mr Wise had volunteered to conduct such an examination but had later reported he hadn't made any progress. Wells closed in. "Didn't he tell you he had found a record in the Lying-In Hospital, Boston, Massachusetts? Did he or didn't he?"

"Yes, he had found a record of a birth of a child, but he didn't say it was a record of me. He said if I would send him five dollars he would get the clerk at the hospital to send me a copy of it."

"And you did obtain a copy of that record, didn't you?"

"He sent me a copy, or a letter, rather."

"What is your best recollection as to the contents of that letter?"

"It seems to me," the witness said falteringly, "it said there was—I don't remember whether it said a child or a son—born to an Addie Weston. I can't refresh my memory without seeing the record."

The witness could not recall if any other name was mentioned, nor could he remember the date of birth given in the letter.

"Would it refresh your recollection if I told you that the date referred to was February 26, 1887?" Wells asked.

"No, sir, it wouldn't," the witness replied.

It made no difference to Wells He had interviewed the lawyer, Wise, and had seen a copy of the letter. "But you do remember Addie Weston's name appeared in the letter, is that right?"

"Yes, there was an Addie Weston."

With that much of an admission Wells closed his cross-examination. Cox expressed his approval and satisfaction by sitting silent.

Friedman, for his part, wished to take the edge off the impression created by Wells's excursion into the Wise letter and to explain why his client had appeared so indefinite about it.

"After you received the letter from Mr. Wise, did you speak to him?"

"I spoke to him about the letter," Segur readily acknowledged.

"What did Mr. Wise tell you?"

"Mr. Wise told me that was the only record he could find, but that he didn't think it applied to me."

That was all. Harold Segur left the witness stand, the court-house and New York He left his fate in the hands of his vigorous lawyer and the inscrutable judge.

WITH THE conclusion of the examination of Segur, Friedman rested his case. Wells and Cox made the usual motion to dismiss the claim on the ground that Segur had not made a sufficient showing to warrant going on with the case.

The judge made short shrift of this. "No," he said, "the inquiry must go on."

The attorneys then requested an adjournment so that they might have time to extend their search for evidence. The request was reasonable, for this was no ordinary case to which the lawyers could come fully prepared at the start. The threads of information going back sixty years were tenuous, hard to pick up and even harder to follow. None yet discovered had led home The judge granted the application for a six weeks' adjournment and said to all the attorneys, "There must be a decisive answer to this case. Even at this late date there must be some persons or some records that will make certain the truth It is up to you gentlemen to find them. While you have divergent interests you are all in the case together and should co-operate to find the truth "

Court proceedings, although not a show, are apt to bear some resemblance to the theatre. In fact, the two do have much in common. What meets the eye in the finished production, whether on stage or in the court-room, is only a synthesis and refinement of the work, thought and effort that have gone on behind the scenes. The Greer case took, in all,

ten days to try, although the trial was spread over several months. But for every day that the lawyers spent in court presenting their finished case, many days were spent out of court garnering evidence.

Cox and Wells had the advantage of numbers over Friedman, and of much greater financial resources. Wells, as attorney for the estate, had its wealth to draw upon. Cox, as attorney for the Public Administrator, could count on the court's allowing him at least reimbursement of his expenses from the estate. Friedman, on the other hand, had neither help nor financial backing. He had only himself and hope. He was wise enough with that limitation to keep his case simple and to hammer away at the points in his favour, while Cox and Wells roamed farther afield in their search for evidence.

THE DAY was the eleventh of June; the year, 1947. The three attorneys, Wells, Cox and Friedman, were gathered in the office of the director of the Boston Lying-In Hospital. They were poring over the individual case records of the patients who had given birth to children in the hospital during the months of February 1887 and 1888. There was an average of slightly over one birth a day, so more than sixty files were given close attention. But it was when case number 6230 was reached that eyes lighted up and pulses beat faster

Case number 6230 was Addie Weston, who, according to the record, entered the hospital at ten-thirty in the evening of February 25, 1887, and at ten-ten in the morning of the twenty-sixth gave birth to a boy. The admission sheet stated that the patient was twenty-two years of age and unmarried. The place for the name of the father was blank.

The daily clinical record of the patient showed that on March 8 the baby was adopted And appended to the file was a single piece of paper, a simple document. It was dated March 8, 1887. The upper half recited, "I, Addie Weston, hereby consent to give my baby—a boy—to the within named for adoption." The lower half read, "I, Mrs. Mary O'Donnell, hereby agree to take the within named baby—a boy—for adoption." The document was witnessed by "L. A Cliff."

There was considerable discussion among the lawyers about the several handwritings appearing in the document. This much was eventually agreed on between the attorneys—that none of the writing and neither of the signatures was in the handwriting of Mabel Seymour Greer, and

likewise that none of the writing and neither of the signatures was in the handwriting of Mary T. Segur, the former Mary Theresa O'Donnell.

Friedman maintained a stiff upper lip throughout the examination of the documents and ensuing discussion. He refused to admit that the record of this birth referred to his client, as the signature of Mary O'Donnell could not be identified with the Mary Theresa O'Donnell who had adopted Harold Segur. The similarity of names was such a coincidence, however, and the identification of Harold Segur in his later adoption papers as a child born in the Boston Lying-In Hospital on February 16, 1887, was so close to the child born in the hospital on February 26, 1887, that Friedman must have had faint hope in any argument that they were not the same and that Harold Segur was not the child of "Addie Weston." But the argument that appeared most promising was that no one knew who Addie Weston was and no one could say that the name was not a blind for Mabel Seymour. The fact that the signature of "Addie Weston" was not in the handwriting of Mrs. Greer lost any significance since the signature of "Mary O'Donnell" was not in the handwriting of Mary Theresa O'Donnell.

One other witness was interviewed by the attorneys on that eventful day in Boston in June 1947. She was Dr. Frederica Cliff, the daughter of Dr. L. A. Cliff, who had died in 1929 She was able to say with certainty that the signature "L. A. Cliff" on the document of adoption, dated March 8, 1887, was the true signature of her father.

Wells and Cox were elated with the Boston excursion. They were confident that they had documented Harold Segur's birth. But in the days that followed the more they contemplated the showing of the hospital records the more apparent it became that they would never be able to button up their case unless and until they could identify Addie Weston and show that the name was not just one taken by Mabel Seymour to disguise her identity.

When hearings in the "Matter of Mabel Seymour Greer" were resumed in the Surrogate's Court on June 25, 1947, it started as a prosaic morning, with Wells reading and marking into evidence the testimony and documents which had been taken at the Boston Lying-In Hospital. But as the documents, more eloquent than a dozen witnesses, loomed into meaning, it became an exciting morning. Here was the tell-tale

trail. At the appropriate moment the judge asked, "What have you gentlemen learned about Addie Weston?"

"Nothing as yet, your Honour," Wells had to reply, "but we are diligently pursuing the matter."

Wells, however, was prepared to throw some further light on Mrs. Greer. During the weeks that the case had been in recess, letters and telephone calls had been received from numerous individuals purporting to have information about the past life of Mrs. Greer. Most of these communications, upon checking, had been dismissed as worthless or unverifiable, but some were from honestly helpful and responsible people, such as Mrs. Elise Hamilton Weisbecker of Southampton, Long Island, who was now called as Wells's first witness. The lady, though no longer young, had a lithe, compact figure and shapely legs. After preliminary questioning had brought out that she was a widow and had been born in 1888, Wells handed her the wedding photograph of Mrs. Greer and asked, "Have you ever seen the person pictured here?"

"Yes, I have," came the prompt reply.

"When did you first see that person?"

"In 1904."

"What name, as you recall, did that person have or go under at that time?"

"Polly Ernest."

There was an audible intake of breath on the part of all the spectators, in which Friedman shared.

"Where did you meet Polly Ernest in 1904?" Wells inquired.

"I met her in a play called *Humpty Dumpty,* played at the New Amsterdam Theatre."

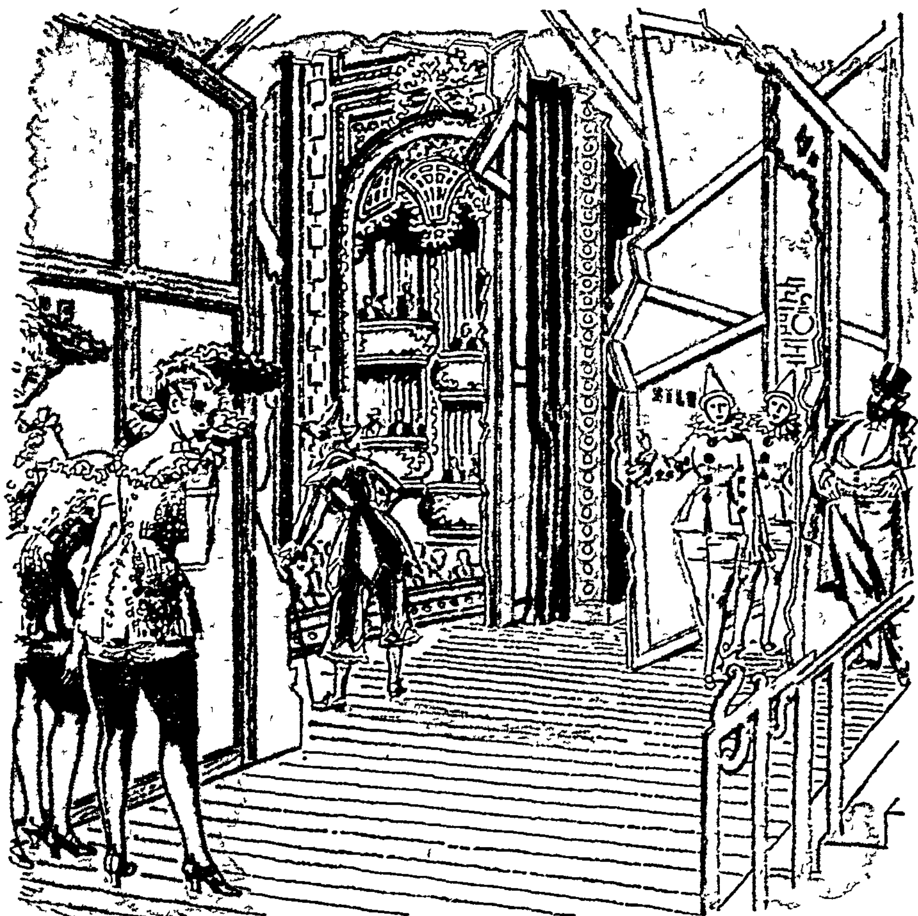
"What part did you have in that play?"

"I was a dancer."

"What relationship did Polly Ernest have to the play *Humpty Dumpty?*"

"She was a show girl."

During the five months the play remained in New York, Mrs Weisbecker informed the court, she and her sister were with Polly Ernest most of the time. The friendship did not end then, for in time the sisters knew Polly Ernest both as Mabel Seymour and as Mabel Greer. The last time the witness saw Mrs. Greer was in 1938, but after that



Mrs. Greer called Mrs. Weisbecker several times, the last time only a month before she died. Against this background of familiarity with Mrs. Greer, Wells asked the witness the question which was his purpose in calling her: "What is your best opinion with regard to the age of Polly Ernest when you first met her in 1904?"

"Twenty-two or three. She was about my sister's age."

"And how old was your sister?"

"She was born in 1882."

Mrs. Greer had never mentioned to Mrs. Weisbecker the birth of a child or the name Segur. Beyond saying that she was born in Manchester, England, Mrs Greer had never said anything about her background or history before 1904.

"That is all, thank you, Mrs. Weisbecker," Wells said politely, radiating his pleasure with her testimony. Cox was satisfied and did not question the witness. Friedman was far from satisfied but saw no purpose to be served by cross-examination, so he desisted.

The testimony of Mrs. Weisbecker was completely buttressed by the evidence given by the next witness, Mrs. Viola Henderson. The attorneys had found her in Atlantic City, where she ran a nappy service. As Viola Cecil, she had played in *Humpty Dumpty* in 1904. She was a member of the chorus and one of the girls depicting "Black Coral of the Sea." She recalled that they wore black tights covered with silver sequins and very large black hats. She remembered Polly Ernest very well, and described her as plump, about five feet six inches in height, with very dark brown hair made up in pompadour style, creamy skin and a peach-bloom complexion She spoke in a low and slow tone of voice and had a distinct English accent. "She had a little mannerism when she would be talking to you," the witness said. "She would sort of lean over and squint one eye and speak in a confidential way, as if she were telling you something of great importance."

Mrs. Henderson was positive that Polly was between twenty-two and twenty-four years of age at the time she first met her in 1904. It was impossible that Polly could have been thirty then because, as Mrs. Henderson explained knowingly, Ned Wayburn and the others in charge of the chorus would have noted a girl of thirty and she would have had no chance for that type of show. A girl of thirty was limited to burlesque.

Mrs. Weisbecker and Mrs Henderson were the first to draw the curtain aside and reveal something of the life of Mrs. Greer prior to 1908 They were also the curtain raisers in the court-room battle over Mrs. Greer's age. This question was bound to be a central issue in the case because, if Mrs. Greer had been born as late as 1880 she could not have been the mother of a child born in 1887 or 1888, however closely Harold Segur might match her description of the child.

Wells knew how fallible personal observations could be in estimating age. He lost no time, therefore, in introducing documents which were even more eloquent than Mrs. Greer's former companions on the stage.

The documents he now placed in evidence were the application for the marriage licence, dated November 19, 1908; the marriage certificate; the

record of the United States Census of 1920 as it referred to Mrs. Greer; a voting register of the same year; three savings-account records; and the admission charts of the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary, where Mrs. Greer had twice been a patient.

As far as these documents showed, wherever Mrs Greer stated the day of her birth she consistently said January 28, but the year varied from 1881 to 1884 In any event, if these documents were to be accepted, she could not have been the mother of Harold Segur.

Friedman had no documents to contradict this showing and had to content himself for the moment with the observation that Mrs. Greer had been very free with the selection of the year of her birth, and that she had undoubtedly indulged in a lady's privilege of making out that she was much younger than she actually was.

THE CASE against Segur was beginning to take shape like a military campaign on a battle map There were three prongs of attack. One was to show that Segur had been born in the Boston Lying-In Hospital, the child of Addie Weston. A second was to produce strong, if not conclusive, evidence that Mrs. Greer had been of an age that would make it impossible for her to have been the mother of Harold Segur. The third, and by far the most difficult, was to show who Addie Weston was and thus to prove that the name "Addie Weston" was not, like "Polly Ernest," just another pseudonym for Mabel Seymour Greer. As to the identity of Addie Weston, however, Wells and Cox didn't have a clue.

The two lawyers had spent many hours discussing how they might trace Addie Weston. Nothing in the hospital records, other than a long outdated residence, indicated anything as to her whereabouts. Was she still alive? Had she married or changed her name? Where in the world might she have moved? Had there ever been such a person?

Only one possibility of locating her, dead or alive, presented itself, and the research this process would involve was something to contemplate On the assumption, which was at least probable, that Addie Weston was a resident of Massachusetts, a painstaking search of county registries, deeds and wills might show the name of Addie Weston appearing as one mentioned, for example, in a will of her father.

"It would be a wild-goose chase," commented Wells.

"Sure," admitted Cox, "but that is the way you catch a wild goose."

So, while they proceeded with the presentation of the evidence they had in hand, their assistants were set the task of going from county seat to county seat in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to see what the records relating to anyone by the name of Weston might disclose.

HENRY WISE, the Boston lawyer, was the only living link with people who had known about Harold Segur's parentage. All he knew was hearsay, but he at least had been on the trail when the tracks were fresher. He was a methodical person who had catalogued his information well.

Under examination by Wells, Wise told of the investigation he had conducted for Harold Segur after the death of Mary T. Segur, who had also been his client. The letter regarding the adoption record in the files at the Boston Lying-In Hospital was produced and marked in evidence. After giving the judge time to read it Wells went on with his examination of Mr. Wise.

"Did you make any inquiry concerning the L. A Cliff whose signature appears at the bottom of the record?" Wells inquired.

"Yes," the witness replied. "I knew him. He had been my family doctor."

What Dr. Cliff knew, then, had not died with him. It had been recorded in a memorandum which lawyer Wise had made of a conversation he had with Dr. Cliff in the doctor's office at three-thirty in the afternoon of January 14, 1928.

This was Dr. Cliff's story: Mary Theresa O'Donnell kept house for a construction engineer named Baker in Boston. When his work required that he go to Mexico she went with him as far as Atlanta. There a doctor told her she was pregnant and it was not safe for her to go to Mexico. She returned to Boston and evidently had a miscarriage. One day she called Dr. Cliff and said, "I want to adopt a baby for certain reasons Do you know a baby two or three weeks old?" The doctor said, "Only place is at McLean Street, Lying-In." She hired a woman to go down and get a boy baby, such loose practice being allowed in those days. (This would explain why the name "Mrs. Mary O'Donnell" on the adoption record was not in the handwriting of Mary Theresa O'Donnell.) The woman went the next day and brought back a three-weeks-old baby, light-blue eyes, "nearest thing to Baker you could imagine." Shortly afterwards Baker returned One day when Dr. Cliff was called in Mary

Theresa got Baker to go out of the room and then said to the doctor, "He thinks this is my baby."

After the reading of his memorandum, Mr. Wise testified that he had never reported to Segur what Dr. Cliff had told him.

"Who else did you see, in addition to this Dr. Cliff, with regard to the determination of the parents of Harold Segur?" Wells asked.

"No one," the witness advised, "other than Dr. Willard Segur, from whom I tried to get some assistance."

This was significant. The judge listened intently to the following exchange.

"Will you tell us, Mr. Wise, in detail, of your attempts in that regard and the results of those attempts?"

"I asked Harold Segur," the lawyer replied, "whether Dr. Willard Segur might not be helpful, and I urged him to put queries to Dr. Segur. Later he told me that he had done so and learned nothing helpful. He then asked me to write to Dr. Segur, and I did. I wrote several letters, and one day Dr. Segur came to see me. I told him that Harold Segur had asked me to try to find out who his parents were and that Harold had said to me that he thought that he, Dr. Segur, could be helpful."

"Did he make any answer to your statements?"

"He was noncommunicative. He wouldn't answer. As I recall it, I put the question two or three times in two or three forms. Finally, in a rather angry tone, he said, 'I can't help you,' and he walked out."

THE TIME had now come, Wells felt, to deal with the Piping Rock incident. Wells shared the doubt which his associate Armbruster had already cast on the credibility of Frank Reitman, who had been the Greers' chauffeur from 1930 to 1942. In addition, Wells had no interest, even though it helped in eliminating Harold Segur as the heir, in making it appear that a possible genuine heir was hovering around. Still, the story of the appearance at Piping Rock of a person purporting to be Mrs. Greer's son had entered into the evidence given by several witnesses, and Wells felt duty-bound to call Reitman as a witness

After Reitman had related his version of the incident, placing its occurrence in August 1941, Wells, in his questioning, drew two possibly important points from him. First, Reitman testified that Mrs Greer had told him that the child was born "somewhere around 1901 or 1902."

This would mean that Harold Segur was far from a possibility. Second, on being shown a photograph of Harold Segur, Frank Reitman stated definitely that this was not the man who approached him at the Piping Rock Club.

In vigorous cross-examination, Friedman pulled no punches in suggesting that Reitman had repeatedly conjured up the appearance of this pretended son and had received payments from both Mr. and Mrs. Greer that were extraordinary. Prepared with cancelled cheques to back up his further questioning, Friedman then brought out that Reitman had received two hundred and fifty dollars from Mrs. Greer in August 1942, which he explained as being for some operation. From September 1942 to the end of the year, while unemployed, he received a hundred and fifty dollars a month from Mr. Greer, and later, in August 1943, Mr. Greer bought him a taxi which he thereafter used as a taxi driver.

With this showing, Friedman dismissed the witness.

Wells had almost reached the end of the evidence he had on hand. In fact, he had only three more witnesses to call, and their testimony, in each case dealing with the question of Mrs. Greer's age, was quickly disposed of.

Tom Touhy, who had preceded Frank Reitman as the Greers' chauffeur, testified that when he first saw Mrs. Greer around 1908 she appeared to be twenty-six or twenty-seven years old. He had last seen her in June 1946, shortly before her death, and at that time she looked no more than sixty-five. Olin Chester Potter, proprietor of a restaurant in New York where the Greers had eaten frequently over the years, also testified that in June 1946 when he had last seen Mrs. Greer she had appeared to be about sixty-five. Mrs. Gertrude Winburn, receptionist for the photographer who had taken Mrs. Greer's wedding picture in 1908, and, as fate would have it, also a neighbour who in recent years had lived in the same apartment house as Mrs. Greer and had known her personally, stated that in her opinion Mrs. Greer was twenty-eight when the wedding picture was taken and sixty-six at the time of her death.

With the conclusion of this testimony, Wells asked for a conference of counsel with judge. The time had come to disclose to the court the efforts he and Cox were making to locate Addie Weston. Their agents, two young lawyers, had been scouring the Massachusetts countryside

for weeks now, delving into musty records of long-forgotten transactions, but with no success thus far. More time was needed.

This would be their second request for an adjournment, and Wells and Cox had no doubt they were approaching the end of the court's indulgence. "If your Honour will grant a month's adjournment now," Wells said, after explaining their situation, "we will then be prepared to offer something definite as to the identity of Addie Weston or confess that we can find nothing more."

After consideration the judge agreed that, following Friedman's presentation of several rebuttal witnesses on the subject of Mrs. Greer's age, they would adjourn to August 11, at which time the case must finish.

The testimony of Friedman's witnesses, as expected, was in flat contradiction to that of the witnesses just presented by Wells. Mrs. Dessie Morris Delgado, a first cousin of Mr. Greer, who had known Mrs. Greer all her married life, stated that in 1908 her cousin's bride had been, in her opinion, between thirty-five and thirty-eight, and in 1945, when she had last seen Mrs. Greer, she had appeared to be at least seventy-four. Virginia Morris, who, as a saleswoman at Altman's department store, had often served Mrs. Greer, testified that Mrs Greer had been about fifty when she first met her in 1920, and over seventy when they last met in 1941.

Saleswomen are good judges of age. They are accustomed to looking observantly at people. Nurses are perhaps even better. Yvonne Paridis was a registered nurse who had cared for Mr. Greer for two months during an illness in 1938. During that time she had seen Mrs. Greer every day and, Miss Paridis testified Mrs Greer had told her in 1938 that she had a son fifty years old. That would exactly fit Harold Segur, born in 1888 or even 1887 Friedman hoped, therefore, that the judge would disregard the records and be persuaded that Mrs. Greer not only could have been but actually was Harold Segur's mother.

With this division of opinion and hope among the lawyers, the court adjourned for the period allowed Wells and Cox.

ESSEX, Middlesex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Bristol, Plymouth are the good English names of the counties of Massachusetts that ring Boston. By the end of the first week in July the two young lawyers working for Wells and Cox had completed the search of county records in Bristol. There

were records of Westons so numerous in Plymouth that the searchers feared they would not have time to go farther afield. They hoped with a hope born of near exhaustion that here, if ever, Addie would be found.

It was on July 13, 1947, that the young men read the will of one William E. Weston of Duxbury, who had died in 1905 and left bequests to all his children: George, Maria, Etta, Eunice—and Addie.

"Open sesame!" shrieked one of the examiners.

"Eureka!" shouted the other. But finding an Addie Weston did not necessarily mean that she was the woman who sixty years before had borne a child in the Boston Lying-In Hospital.

There was one member of the Weston family now left in Duxbury—Etta, with the married name of Thompson. Mrs. Thompson was located and interviewed. Yes, she said, she was the sister of Addie. Addie had lived in Duxbury and died there in 1938. She had married Ernest H. Bailey, her first cousin, who still lived in Duxbury. No, she had had no children With hearts in their mouths the searchers asked the question on which everything turned: "Was this Addie's signature?"

But Mrs. Thompson was unable to identify the signature on the 1887 adoption record of the Boston Lying-In Hospital She was able, however, to dig up an old geography text-book which had belonged to Addie and which contained two specimens of her signature. Addie's husband, Ernest H. Bailey, was able to produce a further specimen—on the fly-leaf of a book, *The Life and Times of Wendell Phillips,* which had been in his home since his marriage in 1898.

The resemblance between these three signatures and the one on the hospital record satisfied the two lawyers that they had in fact reached the end of their search and, in late July 1947, the evidence of Etta Thompson and Ernest Bailey was formally recorded before a notary public in Duxbury. The record thus made was duly submitted to the Surrogate when court reconvened on August 11.

At that time the handwriting experts were called in, and when their expert testimony was finished there was little doubt that, despite some change in the character of the writing over the years, the same person who had written in the geography book and in *The Life and Times of Wendell Phillips* had signed the record of the Lying-In Hospital, and that that person was Addie Weston, daughter of William E. and Jerusha Weston of Duxbury.

Friedman maintained a front of evincing no interest in the proceedings. He now had to concede that there was a real person answering to the name of Addie Weston and that she was not Mrs. Greer. But he still suggested that Addie Weston was only a blind for the real mother of the child, and in this contention he got some support from Mrs. Thompson and Mr. Bailey. Mrs. Thompson testified for him that Addie had lived with the family in Duxbury in 1887 and had presented no appearance of being pregnant at that time Mr. Bailey testified that "all this came as a thunderbolt" He had considered his former wife a virgin when he married her in 1898.

Here was a vignette of drama all its own—the strange oblique course a case can take, suddenly involving people never dreaming that they could have the remotest connection with it, shattering lifelong confidences and laying bare secrets never shared with anyone. But Friedman did not pause to give this thought. By the testimony of one more witness whom he was holding in reserve he hoped, in the final hour, to tip the scales in his client's favour.

John H. Schoonmaker had thin white hair, a long face strongly lined with the years. He sat erect in the witness chair, despite his seventy-nine years. He had lived in Ware, Massachusetts, all his life. He had practised law in Ware since his admission to the bar in 1894, and had served a term as the local judge He had known Dr. Segur all the years that the doctor lived and practised medicine in Ware and before that when the doctor had lived in Enfield, seven miles away. He had acted as Dr. Segur's attorney whenever the doctor required legal services, as upon the occasion of his divorce in 1906.

"Now," said Friedman, "at or prior to the time of the divorce action brought by Dr. Segur against Mary T. Segur, did Dr Segur speak to you concerning his family?"

"He spoke of a boy called Harry Segur, whom he had adopted some years before," the witness answered.

"Did Dr. Segur ever tell you who the real father of Harold or Harry Segur was?"

"He told me he was the father."

"Did he say who was the mother of Harry Segur?"

"He said a young woman whom he had got in trouble."

"Is that all he said?"

"That was all."

"Did he state the year?"

"No."

"Did he state the place?"

"Yes, he stated the place—Boston."

Much cross-examination followed, but all it brought out was that, until recent inquiry was made of him, the witness had never told anyone of this conversation with Dr. Segur, not even his son with whom he had been practising law for many years.

Thus the trial ended, with wonderment on the part of Wells and Cox and high hopes on the part of Friedman. All awaited the final say of the judge.

THE TRIAL JUDGE carries a heavy responsibility, especially when he alone must decide the case on the facts as well as on the law. His responsibility is eased considerably when he has a jury of twelve good men and true who become the judges of the facts, and when he must only rule on the admissibility of evidence and instruct the jury in the applicable law to guide their deliberations.

The Greer case was extremely complicated, with conflicting testimony with respect to opinions as well as facts. A judge most keenly feels his responsibility when he must determine credibility as between witnesses.

It was in the heat of August and after the sweat of counsel had amassed a record of fifteen hundred pages of testimony and a heap of exhibits that the trial of the Greer case was concluded. It was on a cold winter day, December 5, 1947, that Surrogate Delehanty handed down his decision In the meantime the attorneys had prepared and exchanged briefs and had written reply briefs, marshalling their arguments, meeting the opposing arguments, summarizing, explaining, reconciling, emphasizing and discounting the evidence. And the learned, conscientious Surrogate, amidst the consideration of other cases, had been poring over the written record, refreshing his recollection of the testimony, weighing the evidence.

In his decision, when he handed it down, the judge began by noting that the burden of proof was on the claimant, Harold Segur, to establish that he was Mrs. Greer's son. Dealing with the evidence, the judge

observed · "Mrs. Greer appears to have been under an irresistible compulsion to speak of her youthful error. We may put aside for the moment any differences in the factual recitals reportedly emanating from her, for there is one matter in respect of which the stories of all witnesses who spoke of her confidences are consistent. She consistently said that her child was born in a house which she characterized either as a boarding-house or a private nursing home She consistently said that she left the child with the woman in charge of the house and that she never saw the child again from the time she herself was able to leave the house."

Taking up then the date and place of birth of Harold Segur, the judge concluded that so far as the record submitted by the claimant "contains affirmative proof as to Harold Segur's origin, it identifies him as the child born in 1887, at the Boston Lying-In Hospital, to a woman concededly not Mrs. Greer."

Delving into Mrs Greer's declarations concerning the adoption of her child by Dr. Segur and Harold Segur's reliance on those declarations, the Surrogate said. "His case rests principally upon declarations of Mrs. Greer that her child was adopted by Willard B. Segur and had been brought up by him. The genesis of her statements, revealed in the testimony of her maid, indicates very clearly that Mrs. Greer had drawn a hasty inference from the news accounts of Dr. Segur's death, which said that he was survived by an adopted son. Her declarations as to the identity of her child are shown to be based wholly on supposition or speculation on her part"

The matter of Mrs Greer's age, which loomed so large in the case, was quite briefly disposed of by the court on the basis of the records, which to his mind were not sufficiently contradicted by other evidence.

The judge did not neglect the testimony of Jennie Sheppard "The presence at the trial of this witness illustrates the well-known fact that wide publicity of cases which have in them elements which stir public interest almost always produces a crop of so-called 'witnesses' who have become deluded into the belief that matters which they read about in public prints are matters with which they have had some personal contact. The witness Sheppard falls into that category The court is satisfied from the content of her testimony and its own observation of her that she had no knowledge of Mrs. Greer and no contact with her. What she undertook to say is wholly without substance and without weight."

The ultimate conclusion was thus reached and stated that Harold Segur had failed to establish that he was the son of Mabel Seymour Greer.

THUS ended the Greer case—or so thought all who read the Surrogate's opinion that day.

There would still be a will contest of the conventional kind, between the Public Administrator and Mrs Greer's attorneys, turning on the simple issue of her mental competency at the time she made her will. But this would be a rather uninteresting aftermath as compared with the issue which had so absorbed the public

Of all those in the court-room that December day, only one man, Joseph A. Cox, knew that the drama of the Greer case had yet another act.

THE alcoholic ward of the Boston City Hospital is not a pretty place. Case histories here are a catalogue of tragedy. The doctor who drew the sheet over the unfortunate at one-thirty in the morning of August 19, 1947, recorded "Immediate cause of death Cirrhosis of the liver—alcoholism" The admission record told more· Birthplace—Boston. Father—Unknown. Mother—Unknown. Marital history—Single. Children—None. Age—53 Occupation—Carnival worker.

"Hell," muttered the doctor, "the fellow never belonged."

Then he made the closing entry· "Place of burial—Mt. Hope"—a pauper's grave

THE DAY the trial ended Cox had called in one of the young assistants who had been so helpful in tracking down Addie Weston, and commented, "I am satisfied that Harold Segur is not the son and that the judge will so find But we have no more idea than when we started who is. We can't find him alive—no leads. He may be dead. But as you go over the incoming death reports, just keep an eye out for a Segur or Seymour. And for good measure, ask one of the public administrators in Boston to give you a flash on any death there of a Segur or Seymour. The chance is a long one, but it's the only one left."

One morning a month later the young lawyer burst into Cox's office. "Chief," he shouted, "what do you think of this—a death in Boston on

August nineteenth of a man named Seymour, age fifty-three. And guess what! His first name is Willard!"

That afternoon Cox took the Merchants' Limited to Boston. He was cordially received there, not only by the Public Administrator but by the Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. If it could be proved that the carnival worker who occupied the least regarded bit of Massachusetts earth had been born the son of Mabel Seymour, the right to contest her will and lay claim to her estate accrued to the state of Massachusetts. It was to the Surrogate's Court of New York, however, that the state of Massachusetts would have to go to assert its claim.

The Bay State officials who learned that day of Mabel Seymour Greer listened respectfully and with growing enthusiasm to Cox's suggestions for tracking down the origins of the man in whom they were interested.

Cox left his conferees full of ideas and with quite a chore on their hands. The case might be there—he had blocked out the prospecting—but they would have to do the digging Only Massachusetts officials can go about the state of Massachusetts, subpœnaing the records of banks and state and private agencies, to see if they can lay claim to a hidden fortune.

Four months later, on a January day in 1948, Joseph Cox stood at the large table in his office, looking down on the assortment of pieces—reports, letters, records and photostats—spread over the table, and he rubbed his hands with satisfaction. They represented the accumulation of information collected over the past several months in Boston, Philadelphia and New York "Get Mr. Wells on the phone for me, please," he said to his secretary. And then, when Wells came on, "Frank, do you remember the Greer case? I thought you might be interested in learning that I have found the son."

There was a speechless moment at the other end of the line before Wells said, "Here we go again."

"Yes, Frank, here we go again," Cox assured him, "but this is the real thing. Wouldn't you like to have a look at my collection of documents, before I show them to the judge?"

From East Springfield Street to St. Botolph Street in the South End of Boston is only half a dozen blocks. For the brown-haired, hazel-eyed baby that was born at 16 East Springfield Street on May 27, 1894, to the

grey-haired, sullen-eyed man who left his two-dollar-a-week lodging in St. Botolph Street to die in the Boston City Hospital in August 1947, the peregrination was half a century He never knew a father. As a small child he knew his mother. He could not remember living with her, although she kept him with her in various rooming-houses about Boston for the first year and a half of his life. Then he was boarded out, but she would come and see him or write or send him presents.

It could not be said that he never had a chance. He was always housed and fed and clothed. Mrs. Mary Colson took him into her Dorchester home when he was two years old and gave him care far beyond her bargain His mother had agreed to pay her three dollars a week for support of the child, but the payments stopped after two years. The mother moved to Philadelphia, where she lived at various addresses under the name of Everett. She wrote Mrs Colson many promises of payment, but only fifteen dollars was paid over the next three years, and the board bill ran up to five hundred dollars before Mrs. Colson's patience and charity were exhausted.

When the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, at Mrs. Colson's request, went to court to have the boy declared a neglected child and committed to the State Board of Charity, the mother was not unmindful of the proceedings. She wrote Mrs Colson asking for more time and advising that she was applying to the Philadelphia Children's Aid Society for help She even said she was consulting a lawyer, and on the eve of the court proceedings Mrs. Colson received a telegram over the name of a Philadelphia lawyer asking for a stay of the proceedings. But the judge said that he couldn't tell whether the telegram was genuine and that after such a long period of neglect there was no justification in putting off further the state's taking custodial care of the child.

The care was good and extended over the next eight years, or until the boy was sixteen At all times he was in a good home and good school. The entries in the long running record continued for a while to note that the boy remained in good health and that he was doing well at home and school. In December 1902 his mother wrote from Philadelphia inquiring about the child.

But in another year the reporting was of a different character. The boy had turned rather sickly and was not doing well at home or at school His mother came to see him in June 1905 and in the autumn

wrote to him from a New York address At Christmas she sent him some nice presents. That was the last that was heard from her. She disappeared from the boy's life.

In 1906, when he was twelve, the boy's behaviour went from bad to worse. There was a succession of changes in his living arrangements because no one wanted to keep him. His school work deteriorated, but he finished grade school and was given a chance of higher education at the Governor Dummer Academy. From this institution he was expelled before the end of the first term with the remark: "Should have entered a jail." He did enter a jail seven years later. It was a crime of weakness, not of violence, a yielding to the pressure of poverty, a petty theft from his employer. Then he changed his name, a break with the past, a past without an anchor William B. Smith was born, a man of his own creation.

But neither the world nor his ability to cope with it changed. He never stole again. He worked He worked as an expressman, a boilermaker's helper, an attendant at a state hospital, a cook at camps, a labourer and, in 1940, when he was laid off, he reached St Botolph Street and his two-dollar-a-week basement room, for which he could not even pay the rent. William B. Smith had come to his end The forms which the Public Welfare Department required one to fill in for home relief called for a personal-history statement. Willard Seymour returned to the world of public charity.

He had one job after that, as a labourer at the Boston Port of Embarkation. He couldn't hold the job, but he continued to live at St. Botolph Street Only odd jobs as a carnival and circus worker were available thereafter. His only asset was a social-security number, which also served as an identification tag He became ill as well as alcoholic. On July 30, 1947, he had to go to the hospital. That was the day a coterie of lawyers gathered in the neighbouring town of Duxbury to document the life of Addie Weston and rule out Harold Segur as the heir to half a million dollars. And on August 19, Willard Seymour died

"You see," Cox explained to Wells, "the Boston City Hospital record stated that the man was fifty-three years old. We then went after a corresponding birth record and found it. Here it is, my Exhibit One, and it all but proves the case by itself."

Its significance was beyond denial—the certificate of a birth, made by one George E. Thompson, M.D., of a male child named Willard Blossom Segur, Jr., born at 16, East Springfield Street, Boston, on May 27, 1894, to Willard Blossom Segur, a physician, whose birthplace was Ohio, and Mabel Arevalo Seymour, whose birthplace was given as Spain.

"Spain!" Wells pounced on the word. "Mrs. Greer wasn't born in Spain. And the name 'Arevalo' doesn't go with her either."

"As for the 'Spain,'" Cox said, "you don't know where she was born. And 'Arevalo'! Don't forget 'Polly Ernest.' You will soon see how free and fancy she was about adopting names."

Cox next displayed for Wells's scrutiny a sheet from the Signature Book of the Boston Five-Cent Savings Bank, dated February 12, 1894. In this book there appeared the signature "Mabelle A. Seymour," undoubtedly in the handwriting of Mrs. Greer, giving her residence as 2 E. Brookline Street, her occupation as nurse, her place of birth England, and her age twenty-one. The transcript of the account, opened with a deposit of twelve dollars and fifty cents, told a short and sad financial story—a withdrawal the next day of six dollars and four days later of another six dollars, leaving a balance of fifty cents, which was withdrawn on March 27, 1894.

Wells could not question now that Mrs. Greer had been in Boston just prior to the birth of the child Willard Blossom Segur, Jr., on May 27, 1894.

"If the age there given is correct she was born in 1873."

"Yes," said Cox, "that is something which will interest Friedman. It's likely that we were wrong and he was right on the matter of age."

Cox now handed his visitor a packet of court papers. Wells looked them through—a complaint in the name of Mabel A. Seymour, and a summons of the Boston Court, both dated September 19, 1894, charging Willard B. Segur with being the father of Mabel Seymour's child born on May 28, 1894. "But there is no signature of Mabel Seymour here to establish her identity," Wells pointed out hopefully.

"No, no signature," mused Cox. "They evidently didn't make the parties verify their pleadings in those days. But it is more than coincidence that a Mabel Seymour claimed that Willard Segur was the father of her child born at the time stated in the birth certificate."

"Suppose you are right," Wells countered. "Still you haven't

established that the man Willard Seymour who died in Boston City Hospital in 1947 was the child of Mabel Seymour born in 1894."

"One step at a time," counselled Cox He then produced the long record of the Massachusetts State Board of Charity, running from 1902 to 1910, accounting for its custody of "Willard B. Seymour," born May 28, 1894, child of Willard B. Segur and Mabel A. Seymour." The record made note of the fact that the putative father had denied paternity of the child and that a settlement in bastardy proceedings had been made out of court. Note was also made of all communications received from the mother, whether under the name of Mabel Seymour from New York or Mary Everett from Philadelphia.

Finishing his perusal of these documents, Wells remarked, "This record ends in 1910. I still don't see that you have connected the ward of the State Board of Charity with the Willard Seymour who died thirty-seven years later."

"There will be no missing link," Cox assured him. "We don't have daily or yearly records thereafter, but Seymour shows up at sufficient intervals, and each one is connected with the same person. Take this 'Personal History Statement of Willard Seymour' that he made out in 1942 to get a job as patrolman at the Boston Port of Embarkation. Although he was not able to state at that time who his mother or father was, the tell-tale birth date is given—May 28, 1894—and under 'Education' Governor Dummer Academy is listed. So, obviously, it is our man."

Wells studied the form, which also gave Seymour's address at that time as being 16 St. Botolph Street, and listed his changing employment over the years, and his social-security number, 029-8870. The last question on the form was "In case of emergency, notify ———" He had written in "No one to notify."

"That it was the same Willard Seymour is proved three ways," Cox said. "Here, look at the record of his admission to the Boston City Hospital on July 30, 1947, and the death certificate."

Wells observed the significant statements: Address—16 St. Botolph Street. Education—Governor Dummer. Social-security number—029-8870

"Full cycle. You couldn't document your own life as well as that," was Cox's final, proud pronouncement.

"What about the Philadelphia and Everett features?" Wells objected.

"Don't they suggest someone other than Mrs. Greer in the picture?"

"Not at all," snapped Cox. "Everett was just another name assumed by our lady, like Ernest and Arevalo. Again a savings-bank account tells the story."

He produced from another folder records from the Union Dime Savings Bank in New York. The required signature on an account opened on February 23, 1901, by Mabel Seymour was unquestionably in the handwriting of Mrs Greer. She gave her address at that time as 244 West Fifty-first Street, New York City, and her age as twenty-two. The two withdrawal slips, however, by which the twenty-five dollars deposited in February were withdrawn in March, showed a Philadelphia address, and the cheques were cashed at a Philadelphia bank.

"You haven't overlooked much, have you?" Wells said with evident appreciation.

"One can't," Cox rejoined, "when dealing with a supercritical fellow like you."

LAWSUITS, like politics, can make strange bedfellows. When the Surrogate's Court was reconvened on June 25, 1948, and once more "The Matter of Mabel Seymour Greer" was called, Friedman and Wells were seated on the same side of the counsel table. Cox was on the other side, flanked by the Attorney General of Massachusetts and the Public Administrator from Boston. The Commonwealth was there to claim its own. Its first burden was to establish that the deceased Seymour was Mrs. Greer's son.

Cox's presentation of the evidence on this claim was as neat and compact before the judge as it had been before Wells a few months back. Friedman was ready to join Wells in whatever attack they could make on the documentation. In fact, Friedman was somewhat more pleased with the prospect than was Wells. The new-found evidence supported his contention as to Mrs. Greer's age. Now he could argue that it was not only possible for her to have given birth to Harold Segur in 1888 but that Segur fitted her description of a child born to her in her "early teens," while the other child was born when she was twenty-one.

Friedman and Wells pointed out that the detailed record of the life of Willard Seymour was at variance with Mrs. Greer's descriptions of her child. Quite an array of variances was made out: Mrs. Greer had

consistently stated that she had never seen or heard from her child since leaving it with an Irishwoman. No Irishwoman appeared in the life of Willard Seymour, and the record showed that his mother had maintained contact with the child over a period of years Friedman reminded the judge that the Irishwoman went with Harold Segur.

Mrs. Greer had always referred to the father of her child as being a college student, taking medical courses When the child of 1894 was born, Dr. Segur had been in practice for two years. Again Friedman pointed out that the description given by Mrs. Greer fitted Harold Segur, who was born at a time when Dr. Segur was at college taking medical courses. Mrs. Greer had stated alternately that no doctor was present at the birth of her child and that the doctors who brought her child into the world were Dr. Harvey Cushing and a Dr. Derby, whereas a Dr. Thompson had attended at the birth of the child in 1894.

Of course, there was no adoption of the 1894 child, and Friedman continued to credit Mrs. Greer's statements that her child had been adopted by Dr. Segur.

All in all, both lawyers argued, the Public Administrator had not sustained the burden of proof. The new evidence, as well as the old, was much more consistent with Harold Segur's being the child, Friedman insisted With the same ringing tone with which he had first asserted the claim of Harold Segur, he closed the case.

"Your Honour, the new evidence brought before you this day, most importantly the evidence of Mrs. Greer's age, reinforces Harold Segur's claim. I feel that your Honour ruled against him at the last trial because it appeared that Mrs Greer was born in 1881 and couldn't have been the mother of a child born in 1888. Now we know that Mrs. Greer was born at least as early as 1873 and certainly could have been the mother of Harold Segur. I beg your Honour to reconsider your former decision against my client and award him his rights"

The impassive judge with the slightest nod acknowledged the end of the case.

ONE MONTH later, in the ebb of another summer, the Surrogate pronounced the final word which a court could pronounce on the "Matter of Mabel Seymour Greer." "The matter submitted for decision," he wrote, "concerns the right of the Public Administrator, as administrator

of one Willard Seymour, to assert a claim against Mrs. Greer's estate. The central question is whether this individual is the illegitimate son born to Mabel Seymour Greer."

After pointing out once more that the burden of proof rested on the claimant, the judge concluded: "Re-examination in detail of the whole body of exhibits confirms the view formed by the court during the hearing that the required standard of proof has been met.

"There are discrepancies in the record, some arising from the exhibits themselves and some from the variances among the many reports Mrs. Greer gave of her early experience; but the whole is so persuasive as to leave no doubt in the mind of the court that the person who died at Boston City Hospital on August 19, 1947, under the name Willard Seymour, was in truth the son of Mrs. Greer."

THERE ARE postscripts and post-mortems to most lawsuits. The case ends, the court closes, but follow the parties to their homes and the lawyers to their offices and you will hear the regrets and recriminations, the rationalizations and reconciliations, and second guesses which may echo down the years.

The Greer case was ultimately settled. The trial and decision determined only the issue of heirship. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts became entitled to contest the validity of Mrs Greer's will and to lay claim to her property That meant another lawsuit. But there is a long-standing comity between the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Harvard, the beneficiary of Mrs. Greer's will. They did not wish to litigate further the issue between them, and in the end they divided the financial stake.

Harold Segur still works at the same job which has occupied him for the past twenty years, satisfied, secure and respected. He still lives in his second-floor apartment in Auburn Street, Worcester, happy in his family and content in his certainty that Dr. Segur was his father.

Lester Friedman will concede that Willard Seymour was the son of Mrs. Greer But he will stoutly maintain that Harold Segur was also her son. He has a theory which fits all the facts. He believes that the liaison between Dr. Segur and Mabel Seymour was of long duration, extending at least from 1887 to 1894, and that Harold Segur was their mutually acknowledged child, while Willard Seymour may not have

been the son of Dr. Segur. "Remember," he will say, "that Dr. Segur denied paternity of the child born in 1894. Mrs. Greer, left with sole responsibility for him, maintained contact with that child for years and disowned him only as favourable prospects for her life opened up. Then this child was put out of heart and mind—lost and forgotten as far as Mrs. Greer was concerned.

"Harold Segur, however, was a child whose whereabouts remained known, a 'safe place,' as she would say. 'Safe' for her as well as for him. Mary Theresa O'Donnell, the Irish lady, took him at birth and in due course Dr. Segur adopted him. He was anchored, and anchored, too, in Mrs. Greer's memory. He was a child she could identify and in time was willing, even anxious to identify. Hence everything she said to everybody respecting the identification of her child fits Harold Segur, not Willard Seymour—that he was born when she was sixteen and Dr. Segur was a college student, that he was taken at birth by an Irish lady, that she never saw him again and that he was adopted by his father.

"He was her son and should have been awarded a share in her estate," Friedman will conclude.

"Do you still think the Piping Rock incident was a fabrication of Frank Reitman?" he is sometimes asked.

"I don't know," he will say, "but the real significance of the Piping Rock incident was its impact on Mrs. Greer. She knew that Harold Segur would not put in such an appearance. Her fear was that the other son might turn up and ruin her life."

The Honourable Joseph A. Cox, now a Justice of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, is reflective about the Greer case in a different vein. "No, Friedman is indulging his imagination," he will say. "He was misled originally, as we all were misled by Mrs. Greer's statements to her employees and friends, and finally to her attorney. But in the end truth did out. It was quite different from the picture painted by Mrs. Greer, and it leaves no room for any claim that Harold Segur bore the remotest connection to her. He may have been the son of Dr. Segur, yes, but of Mrs Greer, no.

"The Greer case was two cases and two Mrs Greers. The first case was premised on her own representations of herself as reflected and repeated by her friends—a woman ten years younger than she actually was, who as a girl-mother, the victim of inexperience, had been caught

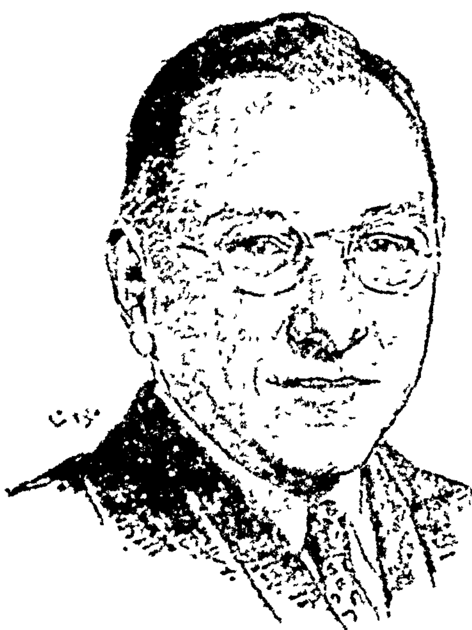
in the toils of an illegitimate birth and, overwhelmed by the situation, had abandoned her child of necessity, but not without seeing that he was cared for. "The second trial revealed the unvarnished facts and quite a different Mrs. Greer—a woman who was neither a very young girl nor inexperienced at the time of the birth of her child. She was a nurse. She was smart enough to hale the putative father of her child into court and press him for a settlement. Any professed belief of hers that Dr. Segur adopted her child must be weighed against her knowledge that he had contested the paternity charge and denied responsibility for her pregnancy.

"The explanation of the contradictions between Mrs Greer's description of her child and the actual facts is psychological. All her statements were excusatory and calculated to enlist the sympathy of those whose favourable opinion she sought. Then, too, her conscience was eased by self-justifying alterations of the truth. She was not willing to admit to others that she had maintained contact with the child for years and turned her back on him only as she approached a better life for herself. Likewise she seized on the late information that Dr. Segur left an adopted son to identify her child with that man because it was what she would have liked to believe.

"What she said about doctors present at the delivery of the child also illustrates the point. She wasn't willing to tell the truth. So her earliest reported version was that no doctor was present at the birth of the child When she came to her latest version in reporting to Armbruster, when her mind was slipping badly, she did some grandiose fancifying and called up the name of the famous Dr. Harvey Cushing."

Mr. Justice Cox will also explain that justice was done in the Greer case. "The fortune was not wasted. It was put to good use," he says "The share taken by the state of Massachusetts was only partial reimbursement of the kind of expense a state is incurring all the time for the custody and care of children like Willard Seymour."

Francis D Wells permits only a philosophical smile to cross his face when asked about the Greer case. "Very, very interesting" is his only comment. But he did make a sentimental journey to Boston, when the case was completely finished, to suggest that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts give belated recognition to Willard Seymour by placing a marker on his grave.



David W. Peck

David Peck is the distinguished Presiding Justice of the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court, First Department. He first became interested in the Greer case when it came before his court on appeal. "I found that reading the voluminous record," he says, "was not a legal chore but an absorbing reading experience." He was moved to condense the evidence into book form, partly because it satisfied his liking for mystery stories with a court-room setting, but also because it provided an excellent example of trial lawyers' work in discovering evidence.

Justice Peck was born and educated in Indiana and took his law degree at Harvard. He was an Assistant United States Attorney in New York and a partner in the law firm of Sullivan and Cromwell before his first appointment as a judge. He lives in New York, is married and has two sons.

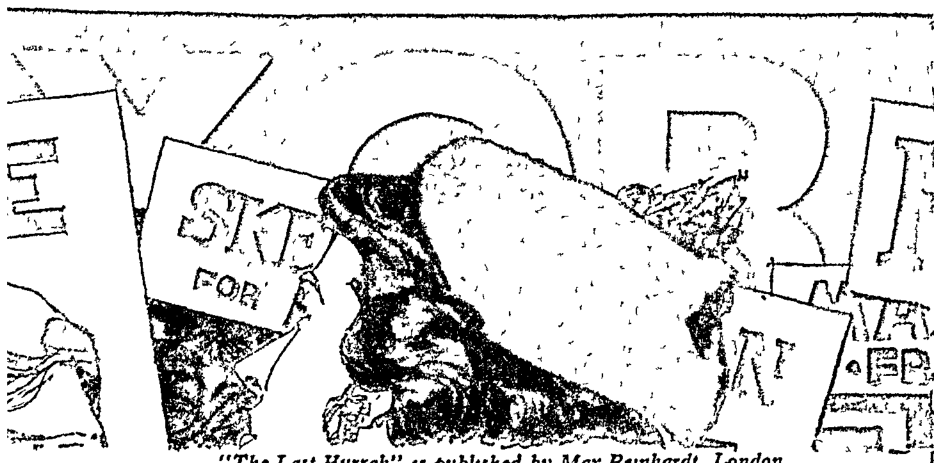


Illustrations by Ken Riley

The Last Hurrah

A condensation of the book by

EDWIN O'CONNOR



"The Last Hurrah" is published by Max Reinhardt, London

"A BIG political campaign, if it's run right, is one of the greatest shows on earth." With these words, Frank Skeffington, who for half a century had "bossed" his city with geniality, chicanery and a touch of poetry, invited his nephew, Adam, to observe his last mayoralty campaign from behind the scenes. Breathless and fascinated, Adam was soon rushing to wakes and rallies, to docks and tenements, to powwows of shady ward politicians.

To his enthusiastic followers Skeffington was "a grand man entirely", to many opponents, an unrelieved villain. Yet some men fought him on principle with twinges of regret; and, when it was all over, it was a lifelong foe who called him "a rascal with a heart as big as Kansas and a marvellous way with all kinds of people."

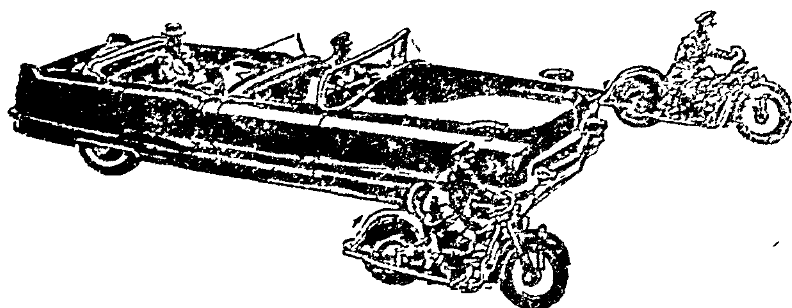
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CHAPTER 1

It was early in August when Frank Skeffington announced his decision to run for re-election as mayor of the city. This was a matter about which there had been public speculation for a good while: for, in fact, four years, ever since he had been inaugurated for what his opponents had fondly hoped was the last time. Since the beginning of the current year, because the dead-line was drawing nearer, speculation had increased and interest had mounted So had the hopes of Skeffington's opponents, for, while Skeffington was among the most durable of politicians, he was getting older, and in recent speeches and press conferences he had expressed little interest in continuing his long political career. On one occasion he had gone so far as to speak with a certain dreaminess of the joys of retirement, possibly in some rustic retreat, after a lifetime spent in the service of the public.

A reporter from the chief opposition paper had led the questioning which followed this hint "Tell us, Governor," he had said (for, as Skeffington had twice been governor of the state, the courtesy title lingered), "just how would you adjust yourself to this rustic life? Wouldn't it be pretty quiet? What would you do?"

"Read," Skeffington had replied promptly. "And reflect." An expression of extraordinary benignity crossed the full, rather handsome face; the long, heavy head inclined forward, and the reporters found themselves looking at the silver crown of his hair.

The reporter had coughed. "We know you've always been a great reader, Governor," he had said, a trifle sardonically. "Any idea of the kind of books you'd take with you?"

Skeffington's reply had been characteristically elusive. "The great books," he had said.

"Which great books, Governor?"

The silver head had lifted, and the reporters met a dead-pan look. "I don't know whether you'd know them or not," Skeffington had said thoughtfully. "The Bible, which is a book composed of two parts, commonly called the Old and the New Testaments. The poems and plays of Shakespeare, an Englishman And during the winter months I would also take the paper which you represent."

The reporter had said warily, "Thanks for the compliment, Governor. I suppose there's some special reason?"

Skeffington had nodded. "During the long winter months a glowing fire might be welcome," he had said, "and I have found from long experience that your paper makes grand kindling. I don't imagine most people are aware of that. If they were, your paper's very small circulation might be substantially increased. Any more questions, gentlemen?"

It had been a typical enough interview, save for the suggestion of retirement. None of Skeffington's opponents quite believed in this; but, on the other hand, neither could they afford to discount it. For there were also the heartening rumours of Skeffington's ill health: among the true optimists it was confidently whispered that a mysterious disease was devouring his brain bit by bit The newspaper for which his nephew, Adam Caulfield, worked—the same newspaper whose combustibility Skeffington had praised—began to run editorials reminding the voters that aged men in positions of public trust could constitute a definite hazard. As the year wore on, obituary notices of well-known septuagenarians had been given increasingly prominent display. When, as the months went by, Skeffington paid absolutely no attention to the partially concealed attack, hopes which at first had been merely wistful ripened and grew strong.

But Skeffington smashed them all in a matter of minutes.

On his seventy-second birthday, at a dinner given him by the party leaders, he announced his plan to run again.

"My decision," he said, "is against my every personal desire. I had hoped, at the end of my current term, to retire to a well-earned rest; but one look at the names of those who have declared themselves as candidates for this office forced me to change my decision As one looks down this bold list one would think that the only qualification necessary to run for mayor of this great city was to be without any qualification whatsoever. This is a time for experience, for leadership; I cannot abandon this fine city to a government by pygmies!"

This announcement had been carefully timed so that it would appear in the city edition of all morning papers; in this way the majority of his opponents would learn the bad news over their coffee, and their day would be ruined before it began. It was a thought which afforded him a virtually limitless satisfaction.

THE NEXT morning Skeffington awakened early, as he always did He rose, said his morning prayers, and had his light breakfast—tea and toast—brought up to him. After breakfast he picked up a book and settled down by the window to read; this had been his morning custom for nearly fifty years. When his wife was alive, much of the time he had read aloud to her; for the last ten years he had read silently to himself For the most part, he read poetry. It was an incongruous picture: the ageing political boss, up shortly after dawn, preparing for the daily war of the wards by reading a volume of verse. It was a picture from which Skeffington—who was capable, at times, of great detachment—derived considerable amusement He knew that this widely publicized habit had given rise to indignation among his opponents; in several campaigns it had cropped up as a major issue.

Twenty years before, it had been the principal target of Festus "Mother" Garvey, a crafty little volcano of a man, still active in city politics. Festus had been given his nickname because of his habit of carrying his mother about with him for purposes of endorsement. She would appear by his side at political rallies The opening dialogue was unvarying:

FESTUS· Good evenin', Ma.

MA: Good evenin' to ye, Festus me son.

FESTUS: Ma, I'd like to have you meet all these grand folks out in the audience who came all the way here to see what I had to say for myself this evenin'.

MA: Well, God love them all, Festus.

FESTUS: And I'd like all you grand folks to meet the lovely mother to who I owe everythin' I have and ever will have. You'll always be my best girl, Ma!

MA: Thank ye, Festus And I'd like to tell all of yez that me son Festus has always been the grandest son in the world to me, and if yez vote for him yez'll be makin' no mistake!

The preliminaries over, Festus would leap into battle. Skeffington recalled him racing up and down the stage, red-faced and screaming, hurling his charges of abuse, mismanagement and corruption Inevitably, he would come to the poetry:

"Here we are in this grand city of ours, payin' the highest tax rate we've ever paid, and the refuse hasn't been collected for weeks!" he would cry. "Our back yards are bein' turned into veritable *bedlams* of nauseous perfumes, and where is the mayor while all this is goin' on? Up in his mansion on the Avenue, *readin' pomes!* The city smells to the high heavens and Frank Skeffington's readin' how Louisy May Lovebreath thinks vi'lets has a dainty smell in June!"

And Skeffington recalled, too, his own rebuttal:

"I have sat here this evening and been warmed by the sight of this good mother, speaking so eloquently on behalf of her son. It was touching Mother love is always edifying." He had smiled benignly at the fierce, diminutive old lady who, hard by the side of her fifty-five-year-old child, sat glaring at him; then, in a thoughtful tone, he had added: "Still, we must not get carried away by emotion. We must remember one thing: *everybody* has a mother. The viper, the scorpion, the asp have mothers Presumably their mothers believe in them. All of us would doubtless admire their tender trust, we would not necessarily share it And so, this evening, while I'd like to congratulate my opponent on possessing such a loyal parent, I'm afraid I can't congratulate him on much else. You heard with your own ears what he had to say. It only proves what I have long suspected: that while responsible civic leaders are preoccupied with grave and serious problems, Festus Garvey

continues to think of municipal affairs in the terms of the simple device he loves so well—the refuse pail!"

He had beaten Mother Garvey handily; he had been beating him handily for years, though Mother, himself motherless now and Skeffington's age, still clung on, an undying enemy. And if the morning poetry reading was regarded with rage by his enemies, it was championed by his supporters. they saw the habit as an awesome and barely attainable ideal, like celibacy or telling the truth, and they were proud of Skeffington for his dedication to it

As in most of Skeffington's activities, there was in his poetry reading, besides pleasure, a strong secondary purpose. His reading provided him with a reservoir of quotation and epithet which had served him handsomely through numberless campaigns One had only to roar suddenly, *"Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend!"* at perfidious Martin Hooley of Ward Two, and poor dumb Martin, anticipating abuse but of a more prosaic kind, would stand gaping and abashed; the crowd would shout its delight, and from isolated throats would come the proud, identifying gasp. *"Shakespeare!"* It was a valuable technique.

HE CAME downstairs at eight-thirty and, with two young men from his secretarial corps, began the day's work. In addition to the routine correspondence, there was this morning a flood of congratulatory telegrams and telephone calls to be acknowledged. Letter after letter was dictated, each with precisely the right touch, each mirroring the exact degree of cordiality, warmth or restraint that obtained between Skeffington and the individual well-wisher. Sheffington had built his political life upon such personal contact, carefully established and just as carefully preserved. In correspondence as well as in the face-to-face encounter, he remembered the minute details that made all the difference; the salutation to old Mrs Lothrop always to read "My dear Lady," rather than "Dear Julia," and the solicitous inquiry about the "indisposition" of her dipsomaniac nephew . . the patriarch of the vast Esposito brood to be called "Signor" and to be complimented upon the hideous grotto he had presented, twenty-five years before, to Our Lady of Loreto Church . . . the favoured diminutive of E Myron Goldfarb to be spelled "Myque" rather than "Mike," and E. Myron himself to be consoled on the death of his cousin the rabbi Skeffington's own

extraordinary memory for such details was fortified by a comprehensive card-index system.

At nine forty-five the doors of the house were opened, and the people who had been waiting outside were let in. For years, Skeffington had made himself among the most accessible of public figures, and he had made a ritual of receiving the public in his home. "I'm available to every man and woman in the state," he once said. "All they need is a little patience." As an afterthought he had added dryly, "And, of course, the vote. I find that may help."

This morning the supplicants arrived bearing congratulations, and promising the undeviating support of themselves and their families during the coming campaign Skeffington, although a man of thoroughgoing cynicism, did not discount these promises; he knew that for the most part they would be kept. In the light of benefits to be conferred, he thought it likely that those who came to him this morning would consider themselves committed on Election Day.

Skeffington sat down at the head of the long library table, one secretary at his right, the other at the lower end of the table filling in the blank information cards given to each visitor. Many of the group had come for the first time this morning. Most, however, were repeaters, with two or three hardy veterans perpetually down on their luck who had been coming to this door for years. In every case something was needed: a job, a letter of introduction, medical care for an ailing wife, a low-rent house, a transfer from one city department to another, a lawyer, money. It was routine; Skeffington handled them all easily and with no hitches.

"Mrs. Rocco Santagata," he said as the first visitor sat down He glanced briefly at the card before him (*Age: 56 Widow. Owns Atlas Road variety store Boy in school trouble*) and then at the plump, grey and tearful Italian woman herself. "Well, what can we do for you, Mrs Santagata?" The deep voice had never been mellower; it became mildly jocular as he turned to the secretary.

"Are those tears we see, John? What do you suppose a good woman like Mrs. Santagata has to cry about on a morning like this? You don't think it's because she heard I was going to run again?"

Mrs. Santagata's eyes grew wide with horror. "Oh no no, Mista May'! I'm-a no cry for dat I'm-a *glad* you run. Honest!"



He patted her hand. "I know you are, Mrs. Santagata. Tell me now how I can be of help."

"My husban', he's-a dead. But he tol' me, long time ago, somet'ing goes-a wrong. come to see you," she began, while Skeffington searched automatically through the great file of memory for the name of Rocco Santagata. He could not place it, and so he said: "Your husband was a fine man, Mrs. Santagata That splendid lodge, the Sons of Italy, is the poorer for his absence."

It was a dead hit; he was not surprised.

"You know Rocco in da Sons?"

"Everybody knew Rocco, Mrs. Santagata. Now, about your boy."

"Joey," she said, the tears threatening again, "my poor Joey." The story was resumed, and from the tumbling mass of words and sobs Skeffington quickly pieced together the familiar pattern: a series of conflicts between a teacher and a fourteen-year-old boy, truancy, the boy apprehended, threats, more truancy, the threats intensified Probably a hellion, he thought; of late, life seemed to have become increasingly full of little Joey Santagatas.

"Has the boy ever been in trouble outside school? Ever been mixed up with the police? Ever been to court?"

"Oh no no *no!* Not-a my Joey! He's-a good boy, Mista May'."

"All right, Mrs Santagata, we'll see if we can't do something for Joey." He said briefly to the secretary: "Letter to Danny O'Brien, School Committee. Have the boy transferred to another teacher. If necessary, to another school. Right away." Another case for the Grievance Committee

of the Teachers' Union, he thought *Skeffington interferes again* "That ought to fix things up, Mrs Santagata," he said. "Go home now and tell your boy I said to behave himself."

"Oh t'ank you, t'ank you!" The woman was in tears again; she grabbed his hand and kissed it wetly. "You're a nice-a man, Mista May'. Like-a my Rocco say I do anyt'ing for you someday!"

"You don't need to do a single thing, Mrs. Santagata. Only too happy to be able to oblige a fine mother like yourself." He half rose, eased his hand out of her grasp, and smilingly edged her away from the table. "*A rivederci*," he said

She smiled in delighted recognition "*A rivederci*. God bless-a you, Mista May'!"

It was late when the last visitor had departed. Skeffington thought suddenly of his son. He said to the maid, "Has Francis come downstairs yet?"

"No, sir. I think he's still asleep."

A growing boy needs his rest, Skeffington thought sardonically; the only question was whether or not Francis Jr., at the age of thirty-seven, might properly qualify as a growing boy. For years Skeffington had been baffled and badly disappointed by his only son. Francis Jr. had been a pleasant, well-mannered, lazy youngster who had skinned through high school, college and law school with but a single distinction: in his junior year at college he had been voted Best Dancer in his class At thirty-seven, unmarried, he could be seen nightly at any one of the city's numerous night clubs, an agreeable, well-tailored man, with a face as unlined as that of a child. He was by occupation an attorney, but his practice was limited to routine labours in the offices of the city's Corporation Counsel, which had been for some years under Skeffington's control And, by friend and foe alike, he was still called Junior.

Though the two men lived together in the big house on the Avenue, Skeffington saw his son only at fleeting intervals. The younger man returned to the house each night long after Skeffington had retired, and he slept well into the following day. And so, this morning, Skeffington was not surprised by the maid's answer to his question. He merely said, "When he does come down, will you tell him I'd like to see him in my office this afternoon?"

He left the house and was driven down to City Hall The passage was

swift and unhesitating: the siren on the big gleaming Cadillac warned off lesser vehicles and traffic lights were ignored Skeffington disliked wasting time en route, but more than that he knew that nothing could be counted upon to annoy his opponents so unfailingly as these fast, flamboyant arrivals, reminding them that their old enemy was among them for another day, living, smiling, poised for the possible kill. It was the kind of knowledge from which he derived no inconsiderable comfort.

CHAPTER 2

At breakfast that morning, in the home of his nephew, Adam Caulfield, Skeffington was the principal subject of discussion. Adam was reading the paper and his wife, Maeve, who had already read it, was standing before the stove, her hands busy, her face quiet and faintly troubled She was a lovely young woman, twenty-two years old, with dark and softly curling hair, and large hazel eyes in the clear, vivid oval of her face She was a happy and remarkably untroubled woman. Still, every once in a while, she would read in the papers the name of her husband's uncle in some new, outrageous connection, and then she would see the small cloud on the horizon. For in Skeffington she sensed danger. It was true that, so far, the danger had remained remote: Skeffington had never entered their married life, and he seldom even saw his nephew, yet all the same she felt the danger to be there.

She brought fresh coffee to the table and, seating herself, glanced once more at the account of the Skeffington announcement. "Darling," she said, "do you think he really means it?"

Adam looked up and saw what his wife had been reading. "Sure, I think he means it all right," he said with a smile "Why?"

"But everybody was so sure he *wasn't* going to run, and then all of a sudden . . . . Do you think he's going to win?"

"Well, I know *he* thinks he is." He smiled again, but this time to himself. He was a tall young man of thirty-three, with a bony face and dark, intelligent eyes, and he loved his wife very much. He knew quite well her feelings towards Skeffington; he knew, too, that she could not understand his own lack of passionate opinion on the subject of his uncle.

She said now, "I was talking to Daddy yesterday. He said that if your uncle did run this year he would be beaten badly."

"Ah, well," Adam said diplomatically. With the introduction of Maeve's father they had reached the heart of the matter.

Roger Sugrue had put himself through Harvard; he had, in time, gained control of a large chain of women's speciality shops. Success among the undergarments had given him confidence, and he had begun to speak with opinionated authority on politics, life, religion. It was from him that Maeve had derived her prejudice against Skeffington. Roger Sugrue spoke frequently of Skeffington, especially when his own advice on municipal matters had gone unheeded. "Frank Skeffington's crime," he would say, "—and I mean no offence to you, Adam; I'm speaking purely as a citizen about an elected official—is not simply that he has let down the community He's done much worse than that. he's let down his inheritance, his people and his religion! That's what he has let down, and that is his crime. It's what he'll have to answer to his Maker for!"

Pronouncements of this kind, uttered over the years, had had their effect on Maeve. Her mother had died shortly after her birth, and she had been brought up by her father. She was loyal to him and, worse, thought Adam, she revered him. So she thought of Skeffington as a kind of symbol of treachery and corruption.

She had met Skeffington only once, and this had been at her wedding. It was a meeting which had proved unsettling to her, for Skeffington was a great charmer when he chose to be and, sensing her resentment, he had made a special effort on that day. So successful had he been that Maeve had been perilously close to succumbing, then she had remembered her father and withdrawn in something very close to panic.

Now, beneath the polite surface of her husband's comment, she thought she detected the note of doubt. "Daddy's very good about things like elections," she said reproachfully. "You don't believe him, do you?"

"About Uncle Frank being defeated? Well, it's a pretty doubtful article of faith, isn't it?" he said "Even coming from your father." Scrupulously he avoided irony in the final words. From the earliest days of his courtship he had decided upon a rule of prudence in the interest of domestic harmony: *No Frontal Assaults on Daddy* At least, he thought, *not yet.* The temptation was often hard to resist; it was

really extraordinary, he reflected, how provocative his father-in-law could be. Even the mildest of his dicta, delivered in that nasal, all-knowing voice, could be relied upon to stir Adam to belligerent if unspoken opposition. Indeed, Adam was sure that when he had returned to this city, after an absence of many years, it had been Roger's attacks upon Skeffington that had left him determined to know and to like this uncle of whom he had heard so much, but to whom he was almost a stranger. "You see, with all due respect to your father," he said, "a lot of people down-town think my uncle is going to win."

"I'll bet Daddy's right all the same," Maeve said loyally. Then she added, in sudden contrition, "I don't mean to nag you about your uncle. I'm sorry, darling. Forgiven?"

"Forgiven," he said lightly. "No trouble at all."

ADAM WENT down-town, to his newspaper office. In the corridor he met the managing editor, a small, bald man with an enormous nose and a curious snuffling speech, who had been trained as an accountant. He snuffled quickly, and said, "I see where your uncle is going ahead with it."

"So I see, Ralph."

The managing editor uttered a sharp barking sound which might have been a laugh. "You know what?" he said. "He's going to get beaten this time, my friend. You'll see."

"That could be, I suppose," Adam said. "I'm not sure he'd agree with you, though."

The managing editor turned to go, and then halted, frowning. "Someone's leaving the light on in your office," he said. "I walk round the building night after night and I come to your office and the lights are still on with no one there. Who's responsible?"

"I don't know, Ralph. Either Burbank or myself, I imagine; we're the only ones in there."

"You know what that means?" the managing editor said darkly. "It means that either you or Burbank is costing the paper money *unnecessarily*. In the future, watch it!"

Even in a community renowned for economical journalism, this paper was conspicuous for its frugality. The managing editor shook his huge nose at Adam as if to underline the warning, then moved briskly along

towards the city room; there, in a distant corner, lurked a copy boy whom he suspected of stealing pencils.

Adam went into his office, where he found Burbank, his office mate, already at his desk, reading about Skeffington, a smile of savagery upon his small, faded face. "I'm glad," he said defiantly. "I'm terribly glad! Oh, how those characters upstairs will squirm now! I came up in the lift with our top brass this morning, and you could positively *feel* the depression, my dear boy!"

Adam knew that bad news for the paper could be counted upon to leave Burbank exultant, for he had been with the paper for more than twenty-five years, and had come to regard himself as its chief victim. He had started well: he had been successively reporter, city editor, chief columnist and even—for one brief, happy interlude—theatre critic. But quite without warning, a period of long decline had set in and Burbank's hour of glory was over. He had been demoted steadily, becoming in turn high-school-sports reporter, radio editor, women's-correspondence editor, art editor, and now, at last, contest editor. This was the final humiliation, the bottom of the barrel, for while the contest itself—Fifty Famous Faces, or Do You Know Your City? or Scrambled Letters—was of the greatest importance as a circulation booster, the contest editor was of no importance at all. His duty was simply to read the mail as it came in, sort it according to geographical origin and forward it to the judges. It was, in short, a job for a filing clerk. Burbank resented it bitterly.

Now he said, "I hope your uncle wins by a fantastic margin. People round here hate him, but when I was a reporter he was always extremely courteous to me. He had a certain manner, if you know what I mean."

"I know what you mean, Burbank," Adam said. He had found that most of the reporters who had covered his uncle over the years liked him, if only because he was always good copy.

Burbank reminisced. "I remember him very well from the old days. It was during his first term as governor; I used to follow him night and day round the state. In his younger days your uncle could play very rough, my dear boy; with all that charm and that mellow voice there were always those two extremely hard fists. I remember one night at a rally in Derrford when they were giving your uncle a bad time of it; before the evening was over he had broken the chief of police's nose



and had run his hat up to the top of a flag-pole. There was very nearly a great scandal, but by the time certain necessary sums had been distributed it was all very difficult to prove anything in print. Oh, I remember your uncle vividly and your uncle just *might* remember me For of course I wrote that article The one that libelled him, I mean."

Adam looked up, startled, at no time previously had Burbank hinted at having played a part in the ancient battles between Skeffington and the paper. Burbank observed this reaction, he gave a dry little chuckle. "You never knew, did you?" he said "No. Not many would suspect that the fallen Burbank was once a hatchet man. But he was, my dear boy, and his little hatchet once chopped away at your uncle. And that is why the dear man owes a great deal to me forty-five thousand dollars, to be exact. That was the sum finally awarded him."

Was it the truth, Adam wondered, or was Burbank merely embroidering upon the past? He said, "I know very little about this, but weren't there two separate suits?"

Burbank nodded. "One was at the start of your uncle's career. It was settled out of court, and I don't believe he got too much out of it in the way of money. Still, he *did* get reams of publicity—very important to the rising young politician. Fifteen years later there was the second suit; and that one, I'm happy to say, really hurt. You see, by that time your uncle was mayor again, and Mr. Amos Force, the beloved owner and publisher of our paper, had determined to 'get' him. At the time, the city was building roads all over the place; and there had been a little matter of a few hundred tons of trap-rock sold to the city at an exorbitant figure. A few unkind people suggested that the real owner of the trap-rock had not been the little Portuguese whose name was on the contract, but had been none other than—guess who? Your uncle himself!"

Adam said nothing; Burbank continued:

"Well, Mr. Force decided to make an issue of it, and I must say that he gathered a pile of rather impressive evidence, which he turned over to me to handle in my own waspish style. The object was, you see, to send your uncle to *clink* for the rest of his natural life. If I do say so myself, the story was extremely well written—and even, I thought, quite convincing. Unfortunately, some months later a nasty old judge decided it wasn't quite convincing enough, and ordered the paper to pay damages.

"I remember that your uncle made quite a ceremony out of receiving the money on the front steps of City Hall He delivered a most entertaining little speech, explaining that part of the money would go towards painting an enormous portrait of Mr. Force. One of the reporters asked him what he intended to do with the portrait and I remember your uncle's reply: 'It will be mounted in the centre of Municipal Park,' he said, 'there to be used as a dart board by the underprivileged children of the community!'"

He sighed "Of course, my dear boy, that was the beginning of the end for me. *I* wasn't to blame. *I* hadn't originated the grand exposé All I had done was to work with the materials given me. But someone had to be blamed, and I was the logical choice."

Poor Burbank, thought Adam. Aloud, he said, "So you wrote the

piece under orders; but you didn't necessarily believe that my uncle was guilty?"

Burbank clucked reprovingly. "Now *that* I did not say at all. We may have had insufficient evidence to put your uncle away—but that hasn't for one solitary moment kept me from believing that your uncle, on and off throughout the years, has been a perfectly outrageous old crook! Still, I wish him well, especially this November At this very moment our friends upstairs are in solemn conclave to discuss their strategy for dealing with him. Because, my dear boy, your uncle cost them money. That's the reason they foam at the mouth whenever his name is mentioned Not because he happens to be a Democrat while they happen to be Republican. Not even because he's Irish Catholic while they've been Yankee Protestant from the beginning The real reason is deeper, far deeper *he has cost them money*"

The little eyes shot up slyly towards Adam "And isn't it fortunate, my dear boy, that your job on this paper is not even *remotely* connected with editorial policy? Because if it were, your position might become a bit untenable, mightn't it?"

It was the sudden flick of malice, but Adam said nothing Burbank went on: "One day, if you happen to think of it, you must mention my name to your uncle. Purely for old times' sake."

"He's asked me to go and see him this afternoon," Adam said. "Shall I tell him that you're with him, though convinced of his corruption?"

"By all means. Some of his most ardent supporters have been convinced of his corruption for years. And your dear uncle, being the realist that he is, knows all about it and could not care less"

Burbank sighed and spun round in his chair; and Adam, who also had work to do, switched on his desk-light, and began to sketch in the rough outline of his comic strip, Little Simp

Adam had been drawing Little Simp for more than three years It had begun as an experiment, and then a curious and entirely unlooked-for development had taken place. old Amos Force had liked it. The precise reason for this liking Adam had never been able to learn, for, now in his eighties, Amos Force was crotchety, unpredictable, and suspected of being half mad. Nevertheless, he had become a Little Simp enthusiast and had arranged for syndication of the strip in a respectable number of other papers.

Little Simp! The name, Adam reflected, was a master stroke. It invited sympathy and affection for his little hero by recalling the bitter days when Simp's cruel guardian, Mrs. Snip Snard, had dubbed him so ignobly. But Mrs. Snip Snard was now in prison, a gibbering wreck. Little Simp—a small, orphaned boy, round, smooth, easy to draw—cheerfully roamed the far corners of the world, a chipmunk named Daddy perched upon his shoulder.

Adam had been troubled by the selection of the proper pet for his little boy. A dog was too commonplace; a cat treacherous; a guinea-pig filthy. He had decided upon Daddy, a spruce, wise rodent, who said *Chrrk, chrrk*. In moments of acute danger to Little Simp, Daddy said CHRRK!

Little Simp adhered to a long-established pattern in the world of the comics: the American child successfully pitted against the powers of international evil. Adam had found that his chief problem was supplying variety in catastrophe. He was for ever faced with the need to destroy people in a different yet diverting manner. Guns, knives and bombs were old-hat, unacceptable weapons. The secret venom, the odourless vapour, the man-eating monkey were better. Unfortunately, no device could be repeated. Any duplication brought swift letters of indignation.

At the moment Adam was working well. Little Simp and Daddy were in an obscure Buenos Aires café. In this café was a waiter, a short man with a drawn face, a comic moustache, and an odd forelock on his pale forehead. His speech betrayed his Germanic origin. One night a customer, startled by this waiter, had leaped to his feet, saluted, and yelled, "*Heil!*" There had been feverish attempts to cover up this monstrous *gaffe*, but Little Simp had tumbled:

Simp. Gollicky-Moe, you don't spose it sure nuff could be . . .? Maybe we're on to something BIG!

Daddy: CHRRK!

It was an ideal situation, one which could easily be sustained for weeks.

Adam worked until shortly after noon, then left for his uncle's office, curious to see what the first post-announcement reaction had been. As he left, he saw that Burbank was still tunnelling unhappily through a pile of entries in the Scrambled Letters contest, his face set in a mask of unrelieved woe.

CHAPTER 3

CITY HALL was a noisy and an active place. In its old, high-ceilinged chambers government officials slumbered, mused, or conducted the affairs of the city according to the opportunities afforded them or the strictures of conscience. Along the endless, outmoded corridors ranged little bands of political guerrillas, having no perceptible tie with the management of the city but perpetually busy with concerns of their own. Red of face, shrewd of eye, agile of tongue, they nodded and winked, all the while regarding one another with surreptitious attention.

Skeffington's offices were on the third floor. Normally well filled, this morning the reception room was jammed to the doors. With the announcement of last night the band-wagon had begun to roll, and the crowd was rushing to get on board. Within City Hall, Skeffington's progress had been slow. He had greeted all the well-wishers, addressing the majority by name; then he made a short speech, thanking all those assembled for their support in the campaign to come. Under cover of their cheers he bowed, waved and disappeared into his office

Here three men waited for him: his chief secretary, Tom Lacy, and his two principal advisers, Sam Weinberg and old John Gorman.

"Gentlemen," Skeffington said. "A grand day to start the ball rolling. As well as heads. What's on the schedule, Tom?"

"Everything's fairly routine this morning, Governor," Lacy said, planting a small pile of papers upon the great mahogany desk "These are all for your signature: the notices to all heads of departments about the collection for Tom McCabe's widow, and thank-you letters to the Knights of Columbus and the Polish-American War Veterans. There's a press conference scheduled, then lunch with the members of the Highway Safety Committee, after which you're giving the keys to the city to Fats Citronella."

Skeffington held up a hand "One moment," he said. "Who is Fats Citronella? And why am I giving him the keys to the city?"

"He's a bebop piano player, Governor. He's coming here this week for an engagement and the theatre people were anxious to have him officially welcomed. Actually, it may not be bad from the publicity standpoint Citronella's apparently quite well known."

Skeffington said dryly, "Well, it's logical enough Lord knows I've given keys to everyone else. Acrobats, aviators, professional wrestlers On one occasion I even gave them to a dog."

"A water spaniel," Weinberg said, gloomily reaching into memory, "from Hollywood. An acting dog."

Skeffington nodded. "Trixie the Spaniel. In my opinion one of the most intelligent actresses then residing on the West Coast. Well, let's get down to business." He looked steadily at the others. "What do you think?"

Weinberg shrugged slightly. "I think just the way I thought a month, six months ago It'll be a tough one." He was a small man in his fifties, with a grey face and dull-brown eyes Nominally a lawyer, he had devoted his talents for years wholly to Skeffington. He lingered in the background, an alert, unobtrusive wraith Skeffington respected Weinberg's knowledge of ward politics, his shrewdness at assessing trends, his ability as a tactician; he was one of the few people to whom Skeffington listened with attention and to whom, indeed, he almost gave his trust.

Skeffington turned to John Gorman "John?"

Gorman said, "I don't know if it will be so tough or not. They've not one good man to beat" He spoke softly, his voice still holding the accents of his native Galway He was a tall, erect old man, who had made politics his life For nearly fifty years he had been a ward boss of unchallenged authority From a single dusty room in an old water-front building he ruled his ward firmly, efficiently and with inflexible party discipline. It was he who found jobs and homes for the recently arrived in America, who supplied funds in time of distress, who built playgrounds for the children. He had won the devotion of most who lived within the ward, and this in turn, as it was the largest ward in the city, had given him an extraordinary political significance. Although it was possible for a candidate to be elected to municipal office against Gorman's wishes, it was not easy; all aspiring politicians recognized his immense power. However, Gorman's ambitions were limited to his own ward. Skeffington and he had been allies now for almost forty years, an arrangement that had brought profit to them both.

Skeffington said now: "It's true they're in a bad way for candidates. Frank Collins is their best bet, but he wants to be the next Senator.

It seems the gracious Mrs. Collins is tired of being gracious on a local scale; she wants to be gracious in Washington."

"The man's a lunatic," Gorman said. "They'll murder him up-state."

"Yes," Skeffington said comfortably. "They will indeed. He'd be far better off running against me for mayor. But Mrs. Collins wants to go to Washington. It's a vivid demonstration of what the love of a good woman can do for a man.

"In the meantime, he's out of our race, which leaves us with only five good men and true as our opponents." He gazed at a typed list of announced candidates in his hand. "Not a man among them ever won an election in his life, and yet Sam is worried about a hard campaign. I wonder why?"

"Okay," Weinberg said. "So they're all dogs. All I say is, even a dog can be tough if everybody gets behind the same dog. And what else can they do? You take guys like old man Force, that little ginzo Camaratta, Mother Garvey, even the Better Government League. they're no dopes. They're only running these dogs because they got nobody else to run. So one morning somebody gets smart and says, 'Okay, let's face it: nobody's got nothing. Maybe we got to get together.' So then they make up their minds which dog is the best dog, and they start to kick him home. And they got plenty of stuff to kick him home with. Namely, the dough."

"I wonder," said Gorman, mildly objecting, "does a man like Amos Force jump into the same bed with Mother Garvey? And would Garvey have him? Many's the time in the ward I've seen the boys all split up and all without a chance to win, and still you couldn't get them to join hands"

"Nevertheless," Skeffington said, "it seems to me that Sam is on the right track." He leaned forward and placed both hands on the desk. "It's a truism that there is nothing like having at least two strong opponents with substantial followings It splits the vote, they knock each other out and we come in free. This year we may see a single candidate, backed by everybody. That could be dangerous Perhaps not as dangerous as you seem to think, but dangerous enough to warrant our taking a few precautions."

He examined the list of names once more: ENRICO NUCATOLLA, JAMES NUGENT, FRANCIS X. RYAN, KEVIN MCCLUSKEY, CHARLES F. HENNESSEY.

At the last name he chuckled. "Hope springs eternal in the bosom of Charlie Hennessey!" he said

"He's nutty. Soft as a grape," Weinberg said.

Gorman said: "He's up there in the house by the reservoir, all alone with a couple of dirty old elk-hounds and a ton of horse meat in the deep-freeze. I'm sure they all eat the same meals. Still, the man's a great talker. What a gas-bag! D'ye mind his speech, Frank, at the dinner for Al Smith back in 'twenty-seven?"

"I do," Skeffington said. "One hour and a quarter without stopping, and all of it mush. I never saw the Happy Warrior unhappier." His eyes lit with reminiscent satisfaction, for, while he had worked with and for Smith for years, there had been a conspicuous lack of warmth between the two men When Smith had been defeated in 1928, Skeffington had shed no tears.

"Now then," he said, "what about the Italians? Nucatolla is Camaratta's man, what else has he got for support?"

"Only Camaratta's friends, the longshoremen," Weinberg said. "The other unions won't touch him with a ten-foot pole. On account of they hate Camaratta."

"We can count him out, then, if all he's got is Camaratta," Skeffington said "And while we're at it, let's count Camaratta out, too. For good He's a double-crosser we've put up with for years just because he controlled that longshoreman vote I don't think he's as strong with them as he used to be. I say it's high time we froze him out permanently. Any objections?" The others shook their heads. "All right, then; we're agreed. That leaves us," he said, looking at the list once more, "with Nugent, Ryan and McCluskey. Which one might be used by a coalition?"

Nugent, Ryan, McCluskey . . . It was agreed that, if indeed there were to be a coalition, all were equally possible candidates. None was outstanding, and all were similarly qualified for election to the city's highest office, for all were Democrats, all were Irish, all were Catholics. "Whichever one it is, the tactics will be the same," Skeffington said "Therefore I don't think it matters a great deal. Meanwhile," he said, rising, "the ball has started to roll; let's keep on pushing it. John, you'll see the precinct captains?"

"I will," Gorman said. "Tomorrow night, at my place."

"Good. Tell them we'll all get together Tuesday night. Sam, I anticipate the usual financial problems. Maybe you'd better have preliminary conversations with our friends the contractors this week. Now: any questions? Any difficulties?"

"There's one thing, Frank," Gorman said. "The housing development in the ward: did you speak to the banks about the money?"

"Yes Two weeks ago I invited them to submit their bids for lending the money to the city. There were no takers. It appears that they're out to get us by claiming the city is a poor risk under my administration. An inhumane group, bankers: '. . . they whose hearts are dry as summer dust . . . .' Do you suppose Wordsworth ever had any dealings with the Consolidated Trust?"

"Now this is serious, Frank," Gorman said, with some impatience, for the housing development concerned his ward. "We need that money."

"You'll get it," Skeffington said. "I'm going to see Norman Cass of the Consolidated in the next week or so."

"If he's refused you once he's not likely to change his mind," Gorman said. "I know Cass; he's hard as nails."

"Well, we'll see if we can't soften him up," Skeffington said comfortably. "You'll get your money, John; I give you my word. Now, Tom, let's get the gentlemen of the Press in here"

ADAM arrived at his uncle's office as the presentation to Fats Citronella was concluding. The outer office was still full of his uncle's familiars.

Adam had decided some time ago that these men fitted into two principal groups. There were the professional politicians, men who spent every day in watchful surveillance of the districts and the wards, each with its special problems. And then there were the drones · middle-aged to elderly men who seemed to have no regular employment, but who nevertheless managed to exist rather well; possibly, Adam thought, on some form of private dole supplied by his uncle What they did for him, what they meant to him, was a mystery to Adam All of them paid Skeffington the doubtful flattery of imitation. Some had chosen to duplicate his formal, old-fashioned style of dress, some his speech; others his air of courtly benignity. The total effect was astonishing. the sight of Skeffington entering a hall surrounded by them was not easily forgotten.

Workers, drones and total strangers were all on hand today. It was the beginning of another campaign from which would come, it was hoped, reward of one kind or another. Adam elbowed his way through the crowd, making for the door to his uncle's private office. Almost at the door he came upon "Ditto" Boland. Adam tried to slide by, but Ditto saw and stopped him. "Ah, good day to you, Adam," he said. He was enormously fat, with a wide, wrestler's neck and a tiny head. Because, more completely than any of his colleagues, he had patterned himself on Skeffington, in dress, speech and manner, he had come to be known as Ditto. He answered readily to the name.

"I'd like you to meet these good people, Adam," he said now, pompously. "They are some of the excellent people who listened to the Governor's stirring address as of per last night at the banquet." He pointed dramatically at Adam and said loudly, "Adam Caulfield here is the Governor's only nephew, gentlemen, and the son of his only sister, since passed on to her reward."

There was a chorus of muttered acknowledgment. Adam tried to edge away, but Ditto held him. "All these good people, Adam, every blessed last one of them, are one hundred per cent behind the Governor. They kindly came in this morning to pay him their heartfelt and wholehearted respects, as we say Adam, this is Mr Casimir Kowalski, a loyal tyre dealer in the West End. And this is his handsome son Jules, also in the tyre game."

The handsome son coughed nervously. "Jul*ius*," he said, and supplied a burst of immoderate laughter. "I mean, it's all right the way you say it, but the name is really Jul*ius*, I mean."

"I stand corrected, as we say," Ditto said. "Jul*ius* Kowalski, of course That's a grand name you have there, my boy. He was no doubt named after one of the many Polish heroes, Mr Kowalski?"

Mr. Casimir Kowalski cleared his throat and said, "I dunno. The old lady named him after his uncle."

"A grand people, the Poles," Ditto said, smiling at him. "A grand, grand people. They make grand citizens. I have always said that the Poles were some of our grandest citizens and always very loyal to the Governor. Every spring the Governor and I go down to the river and the Governor personally throws a beautiful wreath on the water in honour of that grand Polish hero Pilsudski."

Adam said, "If you'll excuse me——"

"One single minute more, Adam. I want you to meet *all* these good people." Recalled to duty, Ditto hurried through the remaining introductions. "This here is Mr. Danny Walsh and his brother Martin, and here is a most remarkable thing about these two gentlemen. they are related by marriage to Clam Carey! Of course you met and knew the famous Clam, Adam?"

"The name," said Adam, "seems familiar, but——"

"The famous officer of the law," said Ditto, "who caught the Murphy brothers building cut-rate caskets that the bottoms would sometimes fall out of. As the body was being carried up the church steps by the bearers there was always the chance that the departed would come sliding out from beneath. They always hated the Governor, by the way, and it was nobody else but Clam Carey who put them where they belonged. In durance vile, as we say. Clam, Adam, is now unfortunately deceased himself."

"He died after eatin' a bad clam," Danny Walsh volunteered. "He was always very fond of clams, Clam was."

"A credit to his people and to the police force as well," Ditto said. "Yes yes. Now this last good man you'll have the privilege of meeting, Adam, is none other than Mr. Thomas Jefferson, who will gladly tell one and all between now and Election Day just how he feels about the Governor. Right, Thomas?"

Mr. Thomas Jefferson was a Negro "I am happy to announce that I stand four square behind Governor Frank Skeffington!" he said loudly "And why? Because he has always been a great friend to my unhappy people! Who has been responsible for better housing for them? Governor Skeffington! Who has——"

"That's fine, Thomas," Ditto said, slapping him on the shoulder "Save some of that fine spirit for the rallies. There you are, Adam The Governor can always count on the support of the grand coloured folks who live amongst us. I intend to convey all their good wishes to the Governor personally!"

Adam was at last able to shake hands all round and withdraw; he wondered if the opening of every campaign called forth these specimen voters who seemed to compose a racial spectrum. He had gone perhaps three steps when Ditto caught up with him.

"One second, Adam. One single second When you see the Governor you might tell him that I'm out here, Adam. The question is this: *does he know I'm here at all?* I told Tom Lacy to inform him, but I doubt if he did. I doubt it very much "

Poor Ditto, Adam thought. He said soothingly: "I'm sure it's just an oversight. I'll remind him that you're here, Ditto."

"That's the good lad, Adam. You tell him that Ditto is out here waiting on his beck and his call. Until then, I will return to my mingling with the voters."

He went back to his group, and Adam, free at last, entered the private office. He found Skeffington seated behind his massive desk. "Have a seat," he said. Absently he fingered a small skull which seemed to have been converted into an ash-tray. "A souvenir sent by an admirer," he said, in response to Adam's inquiring glance "Said to be a relic of the first Republican mayor of the city; note the tiny cranial capacity This place is full of heart-warming legends But speaking of things that warm the heart, what's the mood in the camp of the enemy this morning? How did your paper take the good news?"

"I think a certain lack of enthusiasm prevailed."

"I'll bet it did " Skeffington chuckled, picturing to himself the ring of glum faces round the editorial conference table "I really think they felt all along I wasn't going to run."

Adam thought suddenly of Burbank, he said, "But you have one ardent supporter down there. A man named Burbank. Do you remember him?"

"I remember him very well A dapper man, rather effeminate, but on the whole not a bad fellow. He's still on the paper?"

"He shares an office with me " Briefly, Adam outlined Burbank's history and described their conversation "Was Burbank right, Uncle Frank," he concluded, "in saying that the libel suit was really behind the paper's attitude towards you?"

Skeffington smiled slightly "Well, you might say it was a factor, but not the big one. None of our newsmen friends have ever chased the real story back to the beginning " He gestured casually with his cigar. "But I don't want to bore you with past history "

"I'm far from bored," Adam said. He was thinking that it was remarkable that Skeffington, on such a busy day, should seem anxious for

a leisurely talk with his nephew. Uncle and nephew were not that close.

Indeed, before Adam had come back to the city of his birth, his uncle had been only a dimly remembered figure of his boyhood: a man who came to family dinners on an occasional Sunday and told story after story at which the adults choked with laughter.

After these boyhood days, Adam had been at home very little: there had been boarding-school, then college, then the war. A tragic circumstance had brought uncle and nephew back together. During the war Adam's parents had moved to the Middle West and, when the war was over, Adam had followed them. Then had come, with terrifying swiftness, a car accident: the death of both father and mother in a blinding instant. And so Adam had come home once more, bringing his parents for the last time back to the city where they had been born.

After the funeral, he had decided to remain here. Skeffington had come forward with an offer of assistance, and in the three years since then the two men had seen each other, at irregular and widely spaced intervals, for lunch. At these meetings Skeffington talked amusingly and with apparent frankness, and Adam found him a tremendously entertaining companion. But sometimes months would pass between their meetings.

And yet, on the very busiest of days, his uncle had asked him to call. He said now, seeing that his uncle wanted to talk, "Please go on, Uncle Frank. What did start the trouble with Force?"

"A social circumstance," Skeffington said. "Nothing but the plain fact that my mother—your grandmother—was at one time a maid in Amos's father's house Not for long, however, she'd been there about a year when old Caleb Force fired her For stealing "

Adam was shocked. He had never seen his maternal grandmother, who had died before he was born; he knew her only from his mother's stories She had been, apparently, a slight, pious, over-worked widow with more than her share of the immigrant's burdens and disappointments The news that this monstrous charge had been made against her stirred him to indignation.

"Didn't she do anything about it?" he asked

"Unfortunately, in your grandmother's case," Skeffington said, "there was a slight complication She was guilty." He sat back and watched his nephew's face, what he saw seemed to amuse him. "What she did was

common practice in those days; you might even say it was a necessity. Our people were immigrants and they were poor; the men worked on the docks and the women worked in the kitchens. Maids and cooks were paid next to nothing; when they went home at night to their families, they'd sometimes take a banana or two with them. Everybody did it, everybody knew about it. But when your grandmother was apprehended leaving the house with a grapefruit and a small jar of jelly, Caleb Force decided to make an example of her He fired her himself, in front of his family and all the other servants. As for Amos, he's never been able to forget that the son of the servant who committed this crime against his purse became mayor of his city and governor of his state, and in the course of doing so managed to make life just a little bit more difficult for him. That's how it all started, and that's why your paper, even today, continues its splendid crusade for better government—government without me. Amos has a long memory, you see. I may add," he said impassively, "that so have I."

Adam was silent The story of his grandmother's humiliation was a strange and painful one; having heard it, he was somewhat shocked to find himself not thinking of his grandmother at all He was thinking, instead, of Skeffington, and of the light these revelations shed upon his activities and possible motivations

Skeffington extinguished the cigar in the skull ash-tray "Your friends the journalists are responsible for the curious myth that public men fall out over public issues; I believe it's called division on a matter of principle. It's been my experience that it's just as easy to fall out over who said what to whose wife at a bridge party as over who voted which way on a harbour-improvements bill. But this is not the main business before the meeting. I asked you to drop in today for a special reason. I have a little proposition to put to you."

He chuckled inwardly as he saw the barest flicker of suspicion cross his nephew's face. And then, because he was genuinely fond of the boy, he set about the task of quick reassurance

"Proposition," he repeated gravely "Correct me if I'm wrong, but from our talks together I've gathered that you've never been very much concerned about politics."

Adam shook his head. "No——"

"I think you're wise," Skeffington said, rather surprisingly. "Long

hours, hard work, at the beck and call of every lunatic with a vote in his pocket, and in the end you have a splendid chance of winding up with the assassins on your back and nothing in your purse. Of course, when I began, the situation was different. I had no education to speak of, a good many roads were closed to our people, and politics seemed the easiest way out. But today that's all changed, and on the whole I'd say that a young man like yourself is far better off out of it."

"I suppose he is," Adam said. The conversation had taken a bewildering turn; was it possible that his uncle had brought him here merely to urge him *not* to go into politics?

"Still," Skeffington said, "you'd be surprised how politics seem to fascinate people. It's the greatest spectator sport in the country. People begin as strangers and in a little while they know the names and numbers of all the players; a little while more and they're telling the coaches how to run things. They wouldn't play the game for ten thousand dollars, but it's great fun to sit in the stands."

"And you recommend that I take a seat in the stands?"

"I'm recommending that you take the best seat," Skeffington said. "I'm inviting you to drop in here from time to time, just to see how things are moving along. A big political campaign, if it's run right, is one of the greatest shows on earth. I think I can promise you that this one will be run right. Then, too, I think the campaign might have a certain historical interest for you. Most of the boys coming along these days stick pretty much to radio and television; it's all nice and easy and streamlined I use all the radio and television I can, but I also speak in the wards, in drill and other halls and on street corners It is a difficult way of doing things, and there's no use kidding ourselves· it's on the way out As this may be my last campaign, Adam, I'm serious when I say that this is a chance that may not come again."

Adam made up his mind at once. "Thanks for the offer," he said "I'll take you up on it It's quite an opportunity, as you say. And of course, I'd like to watch you win"

Skeffington nodded. "Thank you. We'll try to give you a good show."

As Adam rose to go, he remembered that he had been entrusted with a mission. "Incidentally," he said, "I have a message from your outer office. Ditto Boland asked me to tell you that he was there, ready and waiting."

"Ditto is always ready and waiting," Skeffington said. "I'm afraid he'll have to wait a little longer. Meanwhile, my best wishes to your good lady. Will you be seeing your father-in-law soon?"

"Yes, tomorrow night. We're having dinner with him."

"He's liable to be a bit dispirited over the news that I'm running again," Skeffington said "I'll tell you what: you may tell him that I've had a complete physical and the result is disquieting. It's a white lie, of course, but it may brighten his evening."

It was not until later, after he had left the building, that Adam thought of Maeve, and of her probable reaction to even this loosest of alliances with her old foe. The news of it, he felt certain, would only serve to upset her; therefore he would tell her nothing. It was the prudent, the *husbandly* solution; having reached it, he returned to the paper in excellent spirits.

At this same moment Skeffington, at his desk, was thinking of the interview just completed. He had said all save that which really mattered: the fact that in recent months he had felt the growing desire to have someone of his own family observe him in the conduct of his last campaign. And it had to be Adam; apart from him, there was no one left. Except for Francis Jr. . . . But resolutely Skeffington put that subject from his mind.

CHAPTER 4

THAT NIGHT, all over the city, there were ceremonial gatherings of various sizes and tempers, which took note of Frank Skeffington's decision to remain in public life.

In the home of Amos Force, the managing editor of the paper was getting his instructions.

"Here is the schedule," Force said succinctly. "One. We will attack Skeffington every day until further notice in front-page editorials. We will begin with his repudiation by Roosevelt. I will write the editorials. Two: No pictures of Skeffington are to be allowed in the paper for any reason whatever. Three: On Sunday morning the paper will come out in full support of Kevin McCluskey. On Monday we will begin his biography; it will run serially for several weeks. It will be warm, appealing. You will assign the reporters who will make it so."

"McCluskey," the editor repeated He knew nothing about him.

Amos Force went on. "We will say we believe this young man McCluskey to be the best qualified of the candidates opposing Skeffington. We will reveal the reason why we believe this as we discover them. That will be your business. You will begin by conferring with McCluskey and his associates tomorrow morning." Amos Force paused. "I have talked with McCluskey," he said. "I was not impressed He is like the rest: trash from trashy stock. But since it is impossible in this city to elect a decent sort of person to public office, we must select the best of the trash to support Therefore we will support McCluskey. Good night."

THE NINTH WARD Democratic Club—there was no Ninth Ward Republican Club—was holding its annual dance. Hundreds of couples danced beneath the bunting and the giant floodlit portraits of memorable Democrats: Jefferson, Jackson, Roosevelt, Skeffington. The bar was open; the buffet was formidable Dr. Joseph Brady sang "My Wild Irish Rose"; Mr. Arthur Piccione obliged with *"O Sole Mio."* The applause for the latter nearly equalled that for the former. It was evidence of the growing tolerance of the Irish; it was even greater evidence of the growing numbers of the Italians. The orchestra leader, in a burst of misplaced enthusiasm, signalled for "Chinatown, My Chinatown." It was a well-intentioned but superfluous gesture; there was not a Chinese vote in this ward

John Gorman sat at the end of the hall, receiving a steady procession of visitors. As ward leader he had arranged the dance. He considered it a grand and useful affair. One got people together dancing, singing, eating and drinking, and sometimes, drugged by good spirits and the feeling of fellowship, they agreed to things which, under normal circumstances, they would have considered mad There was nothing like a nice dance for doing business

As he sat and watched the circling couples, alone for the moment, someone touched him on the shoulder. He looked up and saw a heavy, labourer's hand, freshly manicured, extending from a handsomely tailored sleeve; it was the hand of Teddy Moran, the contractor. The two men exchanged the greetings of old allies, the bright blue eyes of the contractor swept the room professionally.


Ken Riley



"A big crowd. You'll have a food bill on your hands for sure. How much, I wonder?" He named a figure and Gorman, with a slight smile, nodded.

"Near enough. A few dollars on the sunny side."

"Who's got the catering? Jack Shea?"

"Jack Shea for one, but I passed some along to Eddie Macaluso He's a good lad and a hard worker, and he has all the Italian stuff: the pink cakes and the rainbow buns and the likes of that. I like to keep everybody happy."

"Why not?" said Moran. "Listen, John. I was going to drop in on the Governor today but I decided all the clowns would be hanging around What time is he coming tonight?"

"In about an hour or so. He wants to see you, Teddy."

"I'll wait." He looked round the room again and said, "What's the story on the housing development?" As a contractor, Moran had more than the layman's interest in the new project.

"I wouldn't worry if I were you," Gorman said. "We're to get the money from Cass at the Consolidated. Frank's to have a little chat with him next week."

Moran nodded, satisfied. "Good. Well, I'll see him when he gets here. I suppose there's some room where we can have a little quiet conversation."

"There is," Gorman said. "Behind the bandstand." Expressionlessly he added, "They call it the Trophy Room. It's the very same room where the fire

axe fell down from the wall and killed poor Lumps McGuire."

"Better him than me," said Moran sentimentally. "I make it a rule never to turn my back on an axe."

For the next half-hour, Gorman received those within his ward who, deserting the dance floor for a few moments, came over to pay their respects One or two brought bits of insignificant information; there was a request for a temporary job; a young man presented his fiancée. None of it vastly important, but all of it listened to with steady courtesy; one could never tell, after all, what might not one day come to be important. It was towards the end of this half-hour that Camaratta approached him. Gorman had seen him come into the hall; he had expected the visit. "Hello, Camaratta," he said politely. This was the enemy, but the luxury of open opposition Gorman regarded as pointless.

"Hullo, John," Camaratta said. One large brown eye closed in a comradely wink. "Howsa boy?" Like Moran, he paused to gaze in appraisal round the hall. "You got yourself a real jamboree here tonight, pal. You got yourself a sweetheart of a grocery bill, too " He named a sum almost identical to that named by Moran, but now Gorman slowly shook his head.

"A bad guess, Camaratta. Miles off." One did not allow even token satisfaction to the enemy and, in any event, Gorman's rule in such situations was short and simple: *tell them nothing*

"Yeh?" said Camaratta. He laughed loudly in disbelief. "Well, it ain't Camaratta's dough. What time does the big fella get here?"

"Ah, that'd be hard to say," Gorman said vaguely. "The man has a busy night ahead of him."

"Sure, sure He's a busy fella. We're all busy fellas these days, hey? I tell you what, John: maybe sometimes we all get too busy. You know what I mean? Maybe we could do just as good if we ain't so busy. Even the big fella."

He paused but Gorman said nothing. Something was up. Gorman waited.

"I tell you what, John," Camaratta said. "Maybe he should take some time off for a little talk tonight. So long as I'm here. Maybe the both of us could chew the fat a little, hey?"

He's ready to sell out Nucatolla, thought Gorman in surprise. The candidates had barely had time to declare themselves; it was a record in

quick treachery, even for Camaratta. Poor Enrico, thought Gorman; and then, because he was a practical man, he did not waste time in useless pity. Camaratta was here, he was ready to talk business. This early in the game it was an unexpected development, but one of which advantage might be taken.

"If you want to pass the time of day with the Governor, Camaratta," he said, "there's no one to stop you. He'll be here and so will you. And how's your man Nucatolla these days?"

"A sweetheart," Camaratta said instantly. "A big vote-getter, pal One of the biggest. And a real good boy, too. A sweetheart."

"Almost like a son to you," Gorman suggested.

Camaratta lit a cigar. "Yeh," he said. "Like a son, pal So I'll see the big fella when he gets here. So long for now "

Gorman was again left alone. He had been thinking quickly; the more he thought, the more promising the outlook became Only that morning, Skeffington had announced his decision to end, at long last, Camaratta's political career; and here was the man himself, marching double-time to the hangman. Better yet, in his betrayal of Nucatolla, he was bringing his own rope. Gorman did not like Camaratta. The man had no word, no word at all. Nucatolla deserved to be beaten, but by frontal assault, not the poisoned bite of a spider. He was a simpleton, but his old mother was a decent woman and the Nucatolla family had been in Gorman's ward for years

Humming, smiling faintly, Gorman began to beat time to the music with a light foot. It was a grand party . . .

IN HIS palace just outside the city, the Cardinal was seated in his study, an evening paper in his hand He was reading and he was frowning. The day had been long and tiring and the Cardinal was an old man. He was finishing the day's story about Skeffington when his secretary, young Monsignor Killian, entered the study. The Cardinal threw the paper in the waste-paper basket.

"Only an illiterate can go to bed content these nights," he grumbled. "All the news seems to be about war or murder or Skeffington. It's scandalous!"

"Until last night I really thought Skeffington might not run again, *Eminenza.*"

The Cardinal groaned. "Then you're by no means as intelligent as some people seem to believe you are."

The Monsignor smiled. Almost alone among the clergy of the diocese, he was able to discuss, even mildly to dispute, matters with the Cardinal, whom age, sickness and pain had left liable to unpredictable bursts of crankiness He said, "I also thought that, even if he did run, he had an excellent chance of being beaten."

The Cardinal waved one swollen, arthritic hand. "I don't believe it, but if he has? He's had a lifetime to do his damage, and he's done it. I'm not complaining because he may govern us for another term; I'm complaining because he was allowed to govern us at all."

"I suppose he came along at the right moment," the Monsignor said thoughtfully. "Just at the time when our people were beginning to flex their muscles and look round for a spokesman."

"It *was* the right time, and our people *did* need somebody," the Cardinal said grimly. "Very well. The same thing was occurring in other cities. In New York, for example. The difference was that in New York they produced Al Smith, while we produced Frank Skeffington. We have been answering for it ever since."

"I remember some years ago doing research for a paper," the Monsignor said, "and coming across some of his speeches when he first became mayor. The funny thing was that I thought they were good speeches. I had the feeling that here was a man of exceptional ability—with some extremely sound ideas on the management of a city."

"Yes. Which is why this particular city is on the verge of bankruptcy today. We have had your man of exceptional ability to lead us there You young people seem to support the Great Man Gone Wrong theory about Skeffington . he is supposed to be some sort of a wayward giant, a person of charm, cultivation and administrative genius, who has somehow misused his great gifts. Nonsense. I've known Frank Skeffington all my life, and he is essentially a cheap buccaneer with a talent for tricking the ignorant. And if you want to read the record, read the last tax rate for the city. Better still, read the real tax rate instead of the announced one."

The Monsignor said nothing. He felt that the Cardinal, for all his shrewdness, tended to sell Skeffington short; the long years of cumulative irritations, of outrage over the latter's ceaseless manœuvring to use

the Church for his own purposes—all these had bred in the Cardinal a contempt so deep as to forbid objective evaluation. The Monsignor, who had no such personal involvement, felt himself capable of greater detachment. But he did not press the point

"What really is astonishing is the loyalty he commands," he said finally. "And all in spite of some rather serious scandals. Even when he's lost he's always managed to come through with a tremendous vote."

"You don't shoot Santa Claus," the Cardinal said wearily. "Every day is Christmas Day with the mayor. The fact that all his gifts to the needy ultimately come out of public funds is never considered. And it's these gifts that have bought the people for ever. They're good enough people; they don't even begin to understand what's happened to them. Nothing can turn them against the man who shakes their hand, inquires for each member of their family by name in that mellow actor's voice and puts ten dollars—ostentatiously—in the collection bag at Mass every Sunday. They call him," he said with disgust, " 'a grand man ' "

"I don't know him at all," the Monsignor said, with perhaps a faint regret.

"That is your good fortune. I know him very well. And now I think we can conclude this discussion. It disturbs me."

"Of course, *Eminenza* "

IN HIS big frame house by the reservoir, Charlie Hennessey was entertaining Mother Garvey. Charlie had not expected a visitor; he had been prepared for another of the lively, bustling evenings that he so enjoyed alone. Charlie was a sallow, happy tub of a man in his fifties with bulging excited eyes; every night he roamed about his house whistling loudly and tunelessly. He fed horsemeat to the dogs, and if he thought of it he fed himself. Sometimes he hurled himself into a chair to read anything that was handy—he subscribed to twenty widely various magazines, and read books on everything from bee breeding to synthetic fibres. Sometimes he paused to switch on his tape-recorder. He would talk into it without hesitation for half an hour or more and then listen with appreciation to the words he had spoken.

"Marvellous, marvellous!" he would cry aloud. "Isn't it marvellous how we can preserve our thoughts for the ages, and all on a little spool of tape? We're living in an age of miracles!"

But tonight Mother Garvey was a visitor, his small, truculent body sunk deep among the dog hairs that covered his chair. He was a single-minded man and he had come here tonight on a mission for the McCluskey forces; yet the first sight of his host had startled him and diverted him from his purpose.

He said querulously, "Why the hell d'ye have a thing like that on your head, a man your age? And in the house too!"

Charlie took his cap off and examined it carefully. "You ought to wear one yourself, my dear man," he said. "It keeps the temperature even on top of the head, a very vulnerable area. This is a marvellous cap in many ways, a tribute to our day and age. What do you suppose it's made out of, my dear man?"

"I don't give a damn if it's made out of peanut butter," Garvey said irritably. "They'll be comin' for you with a net and I won't be the one to blame them. A cap!"

"Dacron!" Charlie said, replacing the cap on his head even more annoyingly; the peak now rested slightly above his left ear. "That's what it's made out of, my dear man: *one hundred per cent Dacron!* The Du Pont people down in Wilmington put it out, it's made from lumps of coal. It'll drive the wool people out of business in ten years. Think of the implications of that, my dear man! In fifteen years there won't be a sheep left in the country. Eat your lamb chops now while you can, my dear man! We're living in an age of scientific miracles!"

"For the love of God," Garvey said loudly, suddenly remembering his mission. "The whole city tied up in knots by the well-known pome reader on the Avenue, and you gas away about caps and lamb chops! Here's the city goin' over the hill to the poor-house and that dirty devil runnin' for four more years, just to make sure she gets there! And what are we doin' about it? Answer me that! Here I am, the man that's give up his whole life to muni*cip*al service, the man who put in the Phil J Rooney Memorial Macadam Parkway, and today I can hardly get into City Hall to use the facilities! Oh," he shouted, the memory of personal indignities heightening his rage, "I say throw the rascal out of office! That's what's got to be done. What are we doin' about it?"

Charlie examined him critically. "There's a big vein twitching away at the side of your head," he observed. "That could be a bad sign, my dear man. The blood pressure could be up very high; it goes with your

age. I tell you what you do. Buy yourself a little kit and take your own pressure, that's the thing. Just strap it round your arm and pump it up, and whenever you feel yourself throbbing away like a motor boat tell yourself to calm down. Say prayers, take a warm bath; anything to keep the pressure under control, my dear man. Otherwise a man your age could pop like a balloon some fine day. Or there's a new drug out the Hindus discovered over in India; I read about it the other day. One pill a day and you're in slow motion. I'll get the name of it for you."

"Never mind the big veins in my head!" Garvey shouted. "Never mind my blood pressure! For the love of God, keep to the point. *Will you or won't you help us to lick that thievin' scoundrel who's gettin' rich on us all? Will you or won't you, Charlie?"*

"Sense, sense, sense!" Charlie said reprovingly. "Talk nothing but sense, my dear man! Frank Skeffington a rich man? Nonsense! The man has no money at all. He's stolen millions, but it's gone, all gone, easy come, easy go! He's the softest touch in the city. There's not a beggar in town that doesn't park on his doorstep and whine, 'Help! Help! I'm a dying man!' And there is Frank with ten dollars. Oh, goodhearted! You have to say that for him. When he dies the family won't even be able to pay for a casket. I'll have to bury him myself. I'll have to call up the telephone company and say, 'Good morning! This is Charles F. Hennessey. Have you got an old booth about eight by two feet that you're not using today? I want to bury the mayor!' Oh, marvellous!"

Garvey felt weak It was how he always felt after the first few minutes with Charlie He entered always with determination. Then came anger. Then, floating towards him, came the words, the soft, thick, suffocating mass of words, leaving him bathed in lassitude and powerless to resist. The world's greatest living gas-bag, Garvey thought, and getting worse by the day. But still, a man with a political following, a man who could shout you to death at a rally, and a much better friend than foe.

"All right, Charlie," Garvey said weakly. "Only one thing, that's all I want to know: *are you out to lick him?"*

"Of course I'm out to lick him," Charlie said "Why, my dear man, I'm running for mayor myself!"

"Charlie," said Garvey, "you can't win. There's no man deserves it more than you, Charlie. But with this gang of double-crossin' murderers

you haven't got a Chinaman's chance. Come and join up with us like the clever man that you are. We'll lick the murderer together, and carve him up like a Christmas turkey!"

"Ah, my dear man, winning's not everything!" Charlie said. "No no no! The thing is to let the people know what's going on! I'll be in my sound-truck on every corner in the city every night of the campaign, lashing away at them all! They fear it One man telling the truth to the people! A time bomb!"

As crazy as a coot, thought Garvey morosely, but still, a great man in the corner. Adopting the wheedling tones of diplomacy, he said: "But s'pose you could be the power behind the winner, Charlie? I'm backin' a great lad this time. A leadin' attorney at law, a former altar boy in his youth, a World War II vet'ran, a fine family man, and the father of five at the age of thirty-five! A handsome lad with a great personality, and he's way up there in both the Knights of Columbus and the Elks! Now what more could you ask of a man, answer me that, Charlie? Our next mayor, sure as God made little apples. Mayor Kevin McCluskey!"

"McCluskey!" said Charlie. "Holy Cross, Class of 1940. Georgetown University School of Law, Class of 1943. Into the Navy an ensign, out a lieutenant. I know all about him. I've made the usual investigation of all the rivals. McCluskey! A nice pleasant lad, and no capacity whatsoever! Oh, none at all, the poor boy!"

Garvey stared at him in speechless outrage; Charlie continued. "Mediocre! Mediocre in school, in college, in the law school! I've seen the records. Oh, undistinguished! Poor in sports! Slow in the reflexes! Slow in body, slow in mind! Passed the bar on the strength of being a veteran! Oh, I'll have to tell the people the truth about him on the platform. I'll have to say, 'Nice manners, dear friends! But when he adds up two and two he gets five and a half for an answer. And——' "

Garvey had risen in a fury and was standing over Charlie, screaming down at him. "Nearly sixty years old and sittin' in a chair, dreamin' up fairy-tales about a clean-livin' young man who'll beat your pants off! The trouble with you is you lost all your buttons years ago! I don't know why I ever come out here. You won't be elected refuse collector when I've finished with you!"

"Watch the pressure," Charlie said warningly. "The big vein is working again, pumping away, pumping away! And don't step on the dog's

paw when you go out, my dear man. He sometimes lies in front of the door. And good luck in your campaign. You've got a grand simple boy there, my dear man!"

With a final shout, Garvey was gone. The interview had not left Charlie in any way disturbed; in fact, now that he was alone, he suddenly remembered a small experiment that he had read about only the day before. He closed his eyes and breathed evenly, steadily; he placed three fingers of his right hand lightly on the inside surface of his left wrist. He was taking his pulse. Now, quickly, he inhaled deeply and held his breath; instantly the pulse decelerated and with delight he noted that it was fading, fading, almost to nothing at all. It might have been the pulse of a dying man. Marvellous! A grand illustration of one of the little tricks the human body plays upon us all! The way the draft dodgers had fooled the doctors in the war. . . . He exhaled, breathed normally again, and the pulse returned to its strong, steady beat. Marvellous, thought Charlie; oh, yes indeed! He leaped up, playfully rapped the nearest dog across the muzzle and crossed the room to his tape-recorder. He picked up the microphone and began to talk, rapidly and without pause.

IN THE handsome eighteenth-century dining-room of the city's oldest and proudest club, Nathaniel Gardiner was finishing his dinner. He was a bulky man in his seventies, with light-grey eyes which looked out pleasantly from behind old-fashioned steel-rimmed glasses. He was dressed neatly in neutral, inexpensive clothing, for, although he spent annually great sums of money, he spent very little on himself. He was a man of great wealth; he was an exceptionally able attorney; he was something rarer than these: he was—though his good works were never publicized—a genuine philanthropist; a generous man with a strong sense of duty and a deep love for his own city.

He lived alone now, in a room in the club, and tonight he had been joined by his youngest son, Daniel.

"And now for the sixty-four-dollar question," the son said at dinner. "Did you expect this announcement from our esteemed mayor?"

"Oh yes," Gardiner said calmly. "Yes, I fully expected it. I couldn't quite see Frank Skeffington doing anything else."

"Then you're not too disappointed over these developments?"

"I'm not disappointed at all," Gardiner said tranquilly. "Skeffington's a complete rogue, but he's the most engaging rogue I've ever met. I admit to having a soft spot in my heart for our mayor."

"Yes, I know you have. But why?"

"Have you ever met him, Dan?"

"No. But I know all about him."

A smile wreathed its way across his father's face, but he said merely: "I've known him quite well for many years. And during the First World War, I worked with him rather closely on a Citizens' Committee. He's really a most unusual man. Thanks to him our meetings were considerably brighter than they might otherwise have been."

"The jolly thief," said his son. "Or are you saying, Father, that he wasn't such a thief after all?"

"Oh no. He stole. How much I have no idea."

"But in spite of that, you still have the soft spot? Would you even consider supporting Skeffington in an election?"

"Oh no. Not now. Although there was a time, very early in his career, when I did. Some of his early proposals were far-sighted, humanitarian and most attractive. Our first substantial slum-clearing programme, for example, was entirely his. He saw what needed to be done here, and in more than a few ways he marched ahead and did it. He always had a certain fearless vigour which I admired. With this, of course, he had a capacity for incredibly wasteful spending which I didn't admire quite so much."

"So no matter what you say," Dan said, with an air of triumph, "you come right back to the important thing, and that is that he's a crook. No matter how many swings or see-saws he may have put up, didn't he line his pockets on every one? And didn't they make jobs for his loafer friends?"

"Oh yes. All kinds of public feather-bedding and thievery began. I don't really know to what extent Skeffington personally profited from all this, but there's no doubt at all that he was chiefly responsible. I said a few minutes ago that I consider him a rogue."

"An engaging rogue," his son said quickly.

"An engaging rogue," Gardiner agreed. "I don't wish to shock you, Dan, but I find that it's hard to condemn totally a man with whom one has had an agreeable personal association. Especially when one considers

that some of those who condemn him most vigorously haven't entirely clean hands." Gardiner smiled at his son. "I know several reputable citizens in our banks and utilities who, with perfect legality, have stolen far more from the city than Skeffington has. I recall, once, when Skeffington was governor, that he addressed a small, influential and extremely hostile group of these same people. He wanted their support for some measure or other, and here's how he set about winning it. He kept them waiting for three-quarters of an hour before he appeared. Then he began to talk to them, stressing the differences between them and himself, in background, in political belief, and so on; and then he announced that, whatever their differences were, they were alike in one respect. 'We are united, gentlemen, in what is, when you come to think of it, a very considerable accomplishment,' he said. 'We've all managed to stay out of jail!'" Behind the glasses, Gardiner's grey eyes twinkled. "The boldness of it!" he said. "The supreme impudence! He absolutely took their breath away. Oh yes, Dan, a most engaging man."

Gardiner regarded his son with fond good humour. "But let me make this clear I think Skeffington has been dishonest, partial to his own and vindictive towards others; but I also think that perhaps there was a reason. I know something about Skeffington's early life in this city. He had a hard time of it, and so did his family and most other families like it. I don't say this to excuse his conduct. I'm simply attempting to show you why, to some extent, I sympathize with him I shan't vote for him; on the other hand, I cannot join the coalition which seems to be shaping up behind a young nonentity. Now I suggest we adjourn to the library. I want to go over that Thayer case with you."

ADAM and Maeve were at a party given by Jack and Nancy Mangan. Like all Mangan parties, it was distinguished by noise, confusion, quite a lot of drink and rather too little food: the principal dish at dinner had been a mysterious grey preparation, full of indigestible lumps, in a casserole. Despite this, Adam was enjoying himself He liked both Jack and Nancy, and he sat now talking to Nancy, a full-bodied blonde who had folded herself on to the divan with a vast collapsing sigh. "The casserole," she said "Wasn't it *awful?*"

"Pretty awful, yes."

"Nobody seemed to want more and that was all right, because there

wasn't any more. I don't know. I think either you're a born cook, or you're not a born cook, and I'm not, so that's all there is to it."

"We might have been an ideal couple," Adam said. "I have a digestive tract of cast iron."

"Lucky boy," Jack said, coming up behind the divan. He was a slightly rumpled man, with quick energetic movements; he reached over now and gave his wife a playful pat. "Get going, sport," he said. "Mingle with the guests. I want to tell Adam about the cook he could have married if he'd been really clever."

"Ha ha ha," she said lazily, pushing herself up. "And to think I have to leave, just when the conversation's going to become so *wonderfully* witty."

"You see my unique problem as a host," Jack said, as she went off. "Ours is the only house in the city where after dinner everyone drinks on an empty stomach." He sighed. "Well, sport, how's your uncle? I haven't seen him lately." Jack was legal counsel to a small liberal-Democratic veterans' group, definitely anti-Skeffington.

"He's in great shape," Adam said. "I saw him this afternoon in City Hall."

"What a place. They ought to burn the whole dump down and everybody in it. Except your uncle. We think he's the only really able man in the whole set-up."

"Now that surprises me. I mean, that *you* think so."

"Oh yes. I don't like him but he's a power-house. A big-timer."

"But your organization wouldn't support his candidacy?"

"Certainly not!" Jack stared at Adam; the suggestion had genuinely startled him.

"Well," said Adam, "why not? I should think it would be logical to support a man you regard as a big-timer."

Jack glanced at him with some surprise. "We've got at least three reasons," he said. "One, we can't count on him. He's able, sure. He knows what should be done and he knows the way to do it. But that doesn't mean that he *will* do it. In fact, we feel the evidence shows he won't."

"Corruption at the core?"

Jack shrugged. "Call it what you want. The fact is that he's just too tied up to do a good job: too many old pals on the city pay-roll. We

prefer to go along with our own boy. He's no whiz, but he'll learn."

"No names?" Adam asked. "Who is this object of faint praise?"

Jack shook his head. "Not yet. See me in a couple of weeks; we'll be ready to announce then. But about the second reason—we think your uncle's a little out of date, sport. His idea of government is just one man passing out the jobs and Christmas baskets to the kiddies. The old boss principle. Obsolete as the windmill. So saying," he said, rising, "the host returns to his duties How about a drink?"

"Hold up a second," Adam said. "What about that third reason?"

"Well, in one way, sport, it's the most important of all. You see," he said, "we just don't think he's going to win."

"You wouldn't care to tell me *why* he's going to lose?"

"It's too late in the day for him, sport. The Age of the Dinosaur is past. I'd elaborate but for the fact that our cook of the evening has been giving me the hard eye for the last five minutes. Relief is required at the punch bowl. Coming along?"

"No, go ahead. I'll join you later."

Adam was alone. He wondered which candidate Jack would support; he thought that it would make little difference. Jack's liberal-minded organization was articulate but small.

Then all thought was interrupted by the sudden sweep of hunger. Adam looked for Maeve and began to calculate just how long it would be before they could, in decency, abandon the party and go somewhere, anywhere, where food could be obtained.

THERE WERE, that night, four dinners which Skeffington was scheduled to attend; he would eat at none but speak at all.

He was driven to the first one in the long official car, accompanied by Weinberg and Ditto Boland. They had almost reached the hall when Skeffington asked, "Who's this one for?"

"McLaughlin," Weinberg said. "Eddie McLaughlin. You know him. The drunk who kept hanging round you at the Legion convention in Chicago two years ago."

"I remember," Skeffington said, with a grimace. "And that's our honoured guest of the evening?"

"Yeh He died, so they're giving him a dinner."

"That makes it easier," Skeffington said. "It's always easier to speak

about a man like that *in absentia*. How old was the man when he died? And what did he do for a living?"

"Forty-three. He was a veterinary-surgeon."

Skeffington and Weinberg entered the hotel, closely followed by Ditto. They were late, and intentionally so. Early in his career Skeffington had discovered the dramatic value of the delayed entrance; as a consequence, he was seldom on time for any public function. His hosts invariably grew nervous as the moments passed, and when finally he arrived, they greeted him in a flurry of nervous relief. Surrounding him, talking hurriedly, they hustled him into the dining-hall; it was a noisy, hectic progression, and served to distract the attention of everyone from whatever happened to be taking place at the head table This was still another advantage of the delayed arrival; Skeffington often timed his turbulent entrance to coincide exactly with the remarks of some opponent. In this way the admirable effect of total disruption was achieved.

Tonight, settled at the head table, the preliminaries over, Skeffington rose to speak. This was a routine chore, accomplished almost without conscious effort He had the few necessary details; the widow had been pointed out to him; and now there was silence

"Mr. Toastmaster, Mrs. McLaughlin, fellow Legionnaires, friends of Eddie McLaughlin," he began. The words, at the beginning, were pitched low so that maximum attention was immediately secured "When I left the house this evening Tom Lacy, my secretary, said, 'Governor, you have eight separate speaking engagements, and all of them are important.' And I answered, 'Tom, I don't care if I have a hundred and eight. There's one I want to take care of before any of the others, and that one,'" he said, his voice now accelerating, growing in power and emphasis, "'is the dinner the Legion is giving in memory of that valued comrade and irreplaceable *friend*—EDDIE MCLAUGHLIN!'"

He roared out the terminal words; applause cracked in and shouts arose. He continued in a more solemn vein, for the tone was, after all, one of eulogy—at least for the moment:

"A tragic thing indeed that this young man was taken from us in so untimely a fashion. He was only forty-three, in the very flower of his manhood. There was still so much for him to do. Yet those of us who knew Eddie McLaughlin must be consoled by the fact of what he had

already done. I almost hesitate to speak on this occasion of the good he did, for there are others present," he said, bowing slightly towards the widow, "who know far better than I his worth—his devotion to his family, his love for his community, his pride in his church, his lifetime of service to helpless animals, his boundless capacity for friendship. . . ." Here he thought grimly of the little drunken nuisance at the Chicago convention; he added, "His sobriety."

He stole a glance at Mrs. McLaughlin; on her face were the marks of a struggle between pleasure and utter bafflement. She likes the words, Skeffington thought, but—is this her Eddie? He had often observed to his intimates that in these eulogies he accorded the departed their last and greatest favour: he rendered them totally unrecognizable to their families.

He went on. Already he had formed the phrases of transition which would take him from the memory of Eddie McLaughlin back to his own campaign. Accordingly he switched adroitly to Eddie McLaughlin, Political Man. . . .

". . . A lifelong and respected Democrat, he was profoundly concerned with the problems of the poor and underprivileged of our community. This is a noble concern, I doubt very much if our good friends of the Republican party share in it to any great extent Possibly a few of the shabbier members may Still, we must remember that shabby Republicans are few and far between." He gave them his familiar dead-pan stare. "The few there are are carefully concealed from public view: they're smuggled around the city in the luggage compartments of Cadillacs "

It was the kind of outrageous statement his audiences expected and loved. Everyone started to cheer and laugh, the spirit of the eulogy left behind. He came, in this manner, to the focal point of the Eddie McLaughlin Memorial Dinner: the candidacy of Frank Skeffington.

". . . Successful opposition to the slumbering giant of power and privilege must depend upon a united party, under experienced leadership. I can't help thinking of some of those who aspire to lead us in this fight. Are they leaders? Can they run a city? Nobody knows "

In the next few moments he mentioned, briefly, entertainingly, some of his own political achievements; then, his mission accomplished, he returned for the final token nod at Eddie McLaughlin.

"But we have strayed far afield," he said. His voice was faintly reproachful; it was as if he were gently chiding the audience for having led him into talking about himself. "In thinking of the necessity for experienced leadership in these troubled times, we may seem to have forgotten the purpose of our being here tonight. Yet nothing could be farther from the truth. No man among us was more aware of our city's problems than Eddie McLaughlin. To discuss these issues is then, in the larger sense, to pay tribute to Eddie McLaughlin.

"And now we know in our hearts that this generous, courageous man has gained his reward. By this time to his ears have come those blessed words which he was born to hear: 'Well done, Eddie McLaughlin! Well done, thou good and faithful servant!'" He inclined his head slightly and the room rocked with cheers and applause.

He did not sit down again; instead, he made his way to the nearest exit and to his waiting car. Once again he was able to relax against the cushions, flanked by Weinberg and Ditto.

"A good talk," Weinberg said approvingly.

"Adequate, Sam, adequate," he said. "Eddie dead served us far better than Eddie living, that's sure."

"That was a very grand speech, Governor," Ditto said feelingly. "And I'm sure that the very same man in question you spoke in favour of tonight must be looking down on us just now and feeling proud of himself!"

"A sentiment like that does you credit, Ditto," Skeffington said. "There's only one thing wrong and that's your sense of direction. I doubt very much that he's looking down on us tonight; I have a feeling that, from where the good Eddie is, it's a hell of a long look up." He leaned towards the front seat and said to his chauffeur, "Pick it up a bit, Charlie. We have a lot of work to do before we go to bed. . . ."

Four hours later, Skeffington was home and in bed. He had spoken at three more dinners, he had gone to the dance given by John Gorman. Here he had conversed with Camaratta, and the memory of that conversation now caused him to chuckle aloud. After this election, the Italian would be politically dead, buried and forgotten. This thought gave Skeffington some satisfaction. The whole day and the night—and especially the interview with his nephew—had been satisfactory.

His eyes closed He was more tired than he had been for some time, and he did not try to fool himself into believing that he was not. The day had been too long and too full—but it had been worth it.

Just before sleep, he thought, as he often did, of his wife, and wished she had been with him today. Then, in the final seconds of his conscious day, he thought suddenly of his son and of the fact that he had not bothered to come to City Hall as his father had requested Skeffington sighed: no day, however triumphant, could escape totally without a shadow.

Two hours later, Francis Skeffington Jr. returned home. He came up the stairs with a light, almost prancing step, singing softly. He had been drinking; but only enough to be happy, for he liked to be happy. He was singing "Whose Honey Are You?" as done in the manner of Fats Citronella, the original words shot through with the primitive cries and grunts which had projected that gifted entertainer into fame. He had met Fats only an hour before; Fats had greeted him with enthusiasm.

"I met your daddy-daddy today, boy!" he had said, his great eyes beaming. "Reet! He gimme one of them *real* gone keys!"

Now, passing his father's closed door, Junior suddenly remembered that he should have gone to see him earlier that day. What with one thing and another, he had forgotten. He wondered if it were anything important. . . . He thought not. And he went to his room, still singing softly, *"Whose honey are you . . . ?"*

CHAPTER 5

And so the campaign got under way. In these early weeks, the work was vigorous but routine. there were no great rallies, no mass meetings, no radio or television addresses. It was a time of subsurface manœuvring. There were daily conferences between Skeffington and his chief lieutenants, regular meetings with the ward and precinct leaders, the establishing and renovating of the lines with which each city block was bound to City Hall One of the more immediate matters of concern was the funds for the housing development in John Gorman's ward. This was something which could not be postponed.

Gorman was too close a friend; more, he was far too influential.

Accordingly Skeffington scheduled two unusual interviews. The first was with Norman Cass Jr., the son of the banker. He was a blue-eyed man of forty, with a small, faintly silly face; his hair, beginning to grey, was trimmed in a perpetual crew cut. He wore a narrow-shouldered suit of tan gabardine, a blue polka-dot bow tie and a pair of old and much-scuffed white buckskin shoes. His appearance suggested that of a very old undergraduate He entered Skeffington's office saying, possibly in apology for his costume, "I'm afraid I've jutht thith minute come up from the country."

The lisp was more than perceptible · it leaped out at the auditor. It gave everything said by Norman Cass Jr. a comic dimension which, the contents of his words considered, could not have been more superfluous.

"Very good of you to drop in today," Skeffington said. "To judge from your appearance, life in the country must be healthy. I imagine golf and sailing play their part in keeping you so fit."

"Thailing, printhipally," his guest replied. "In my thloop."

For just an instant Skeffington thought he was being made game of. He looked sharply at the face confronting him, that distinguished-family face, marred by the slight taint of boobery. Then he said, "A fascinating vessel, the sloop. Played a major role in the development of our fair city."

He talked for a few minutes about the maritime history of their fair city; only gradually did he lead the conversation into more pertinent channels He then began to speak of men who found it necessary to subordinate their political differences in a time of civic emergency; he spoke of the Indispensable Man who sometimes arose to save his city; he at first hinted, then stated more explicitly, that the Indispensable Man in this instance was none other than Norman Cass Jr "In short, Mr. Cass," he said solemnly, "your city needs you. I'm telling you no secret when I say that the best minds of our community are agreed that our new Fire Commissioner should be Norman Cass Jr.!"

"Fire Commithioner!" Obviously, the suggestion that Norman Cass Jr. could be of some service was both unexpected and unprecedented. "But I work at the bank. I have no political ambithionth whatever."

"It's not a question of politics, Mr. Cass It's a question of municipal need, of civic duty. I'll wager you already know something about our Fire Department."

"Well, no . . . naturally," he added, with a small treble giggle, "I know that it putth out fireth."

"Exactly," said Skeffington, with a look of congratulation. "It puts out fires. You've put your finger right on the key to the whole situation, Mr. Cass, as I knew you would." He went on to explain that the present commissioner had proved a vast disappointment. What was needed was an able administrator, a man who inspired public confidence and trust. People knew Cass's work with the wonderful Boy Scout movement. And the Red Cross.

"Well, really, I——" Again the small giggle.

"Of course there are disadvantages too," Skeffington said casually. "First of all, I'm afraid you'd be extremely conspicuous. At every major conflagration you'd be present in a position of command, a recognizable figure in the commissioner's uniform of pure white. And in your day-by-day activities you'd ride in the long, maroon commissioner's-car, equipped with a siren and two uniformed firemen to attend you. I realize that to a man of your reticence such attention must be distasteful. Still, I tell you because I want you to know just what you'd be getting into."

He saw the blue eyes gleam with interest at the mention of "white uniform"; he saw them grow brighter with each passing word; he knew that he had not mistaken his man.

"Well," Cass said, "we all have to make thacrifitheth. If you put it that way, I don't know very well how I can refuthe. . . ."

"Now don't let me stampede you into anything, Mr. Cass," Skeffington said. "Why don't you sleep on this? Talk it over with your good wife. Then, tomorrow, write me of your decision."

"That'th very kind of you," Cass said, "but I could give you my anther right now if——"

"No, no." Still talking, Skeffington rose and walked to the other side of the desk. Gracefully, the interview came to a close; Cass left the office, reluctantly promising to defer his decision until the morning. Skeffington returned to his desk well satisfied. The written acknowledgment from Cass was what he needed.

It arrived the following day. Skeffington took one look at it, then made another telephone call. Twenty-four hours later Norman Cass Sr. was in his office.

"You wished to see me," he said in a matter-of-fact voice. He was a

short, compact, unobtrusive man, and in his face there was no silliness at all. Skeffington always enjoyed going to the mat with this shrewd, calm, tough financier, so well-born, so rich, so utterly ruthless.

"I naturally hated to intrude upon your busy day," he said, "but a matter of some urgency arose, and I thought we might be able to settle it in a few minutes of friendly conversation." Absently he fingered the skull ash-tray on his desk, then lifted it for his visitor's inspection. "An interesting object Said to be the skull of our first Republican governor. They seem to have had remarkably small heads in those days, don't they?"

"As you know," Cass said emotionlessly, "the first Republican governor of this state happens to have been an ancestor of mine Since his bones are in the family vault at Mount Andrews Cemetery, I don't think your story has a great deal of foundation in fact"

"Why, bless my soul," said Skeffington, "I'd completely forgotten that there was a family connection." He was delighted. It had been a fine opening gambit He said, "I seem to have been victimized by a charlatan. I've been sold the skull of a spurious Republican."

Cass nodded politely. "There was some specific matter you wished to discuss?"

"There is indeed A little matter of municipal finance. To put it in a nutshell, I'd like to have you reconsider your position on that loan to the city."

Cass shook his head slightly. "I'm afraid that's impossible. We've given it thorough consideration. Our decision is unanimous."

"So I hear. But, Mr. Cass, this is not an ordinary loan. I should think the fact that most of the money is to go for low-cost housing might make some difference on humanitarian grounds. You know how crowded conditions are over in Ward Nine"

"I can assure you that this fact was considered," Cass said. "We agree that the conditions in Ward Nine are deplorable. I believe we also agree," he said, in the same tone of voice, "upon whose shoulders the blame for this must rest Some of us seem to remember that, in the past, loans were granted for similar purposes What work was done was done at a prohibitive cost. We feel that it would be unwise to grant any further loan at this time."

Skeffington sighed. "You're a hard man to do business with, Mr. Cass.

If that's your position, I don't see that there's anything more to say."

For just an instant, a light appeared in the eyes of the man who stood so trim, so immaculate, so victorious before him; then it died and Norman Cass said, "Good day, sir."

It was not until then that Skeffington released his bomb. "One moment," he said. From his desk he took the letter written by Norman Cass Jr. and handed it to the father. "I was so absorbed in your words I almost forgot to show this to you."

Cass read the short letter swiftly. He said steadily, "What is this foolishness?"

"A major civic appointment is in the offing. This is the letter of acceptance from the potential appointee. You may keep it, if you wish." He added thoughtfully, "I believe I have several photostatic copies. The boy was made for the job, don't you think?"

"Nonsense. You have no intention of appointing him. You know it. I know it."

"But does *he* know it?" Skeffington asked. "Apparently not; here's his letter of consent. It occurred to me that we might use it as a basis for our further discussion."

"We have nothing to discuss. If you attempt to use that letter, my son will repudiate it immediately."

"Will he?" Skeffington asked. "I had a revealing talk with the boy the other day; he seemed to me to be rather eager to feel the spotlight's rays upon him. I suppose that's the natural consequence of having lived so long in the shadow of a successful father. Maybe you could force him to repudiate it, and then again maybe you couldn't I'm sure I don't care, because it won't make the slightest difference what he does. The situation isn't exactly under his control any longer Or yours either, if it comes to that." He leaned forward, partially supporting himself with his arms on the desk; it was the old, familiar position of command. He said, "Have a seat, Mr. Cass I think the time has come to speak plainly."

Cass said nothing. He remained standing; then, slowly, and still looking steadily at Skeffington, he sat down.

"Now," said Skeffington, "here's the position as I see it. I intend to appoint your son, and then leave him to his own devices. How long will the boy last in a job which he doesn't know the first thing about, and where every politician in the city will be after him—first, because he got

the job, and second, because he's your son? Within two months of his appointment the papers will be screaming for his resignation. There'll be charges of incompetence, even of graft—I don't imagine the boy, with his limited experience, will know how to protect himself against that one. Well, if that happened, you can see what my position would be. I'd have to step in and remove him from office. For my own protection, I'd have to explain that I'd made a grievous mistake in the appointment, but that I had naturally assumed that a member of one of our first families would be above such behaviour. That wouldn't be so good, would it, Mr. Cass?"

Again a light showed in Cass's eyes, a light of quite a different sort. It burned across the table at Skeffington Still Cass did not speak. A lifetime spent on the politely savage background of his profession had given him a high opinion of silence and self-control. He had grasped, instantly, the desperate nature of his predicament, but there was still one way out. It was a way Skeffington now proceeded to close.

"There is the possibility that your son, at your insistence, might turn round and refuse the appointment In that case I might, to protect myself, have to tell a little white lie. I might have to start a rumour circulating that your son had been offered the post. Then I'd have to come out with a denial of the whole thing, give the letter of acceptance to the papers and explain that the boy had been the victim of a delusion, that he came to see me and offered his services to the city. I might say that, while I respectfully declined this kind offer, he somehow acquired the fantastic notion that he was to be appointed Fire Commissioner. You and I, of course, would be conscious of a little exaggeration in this story, but I think it would be believed by the public; particularly since we have his letter. I wouldn't be surprised if you and your family became the laughing-stock of the city. It's a situation that gives me some concern; I don't quite know what to do about it." He looked solicitously at his old antagonist and said, "Got any ideas?"

And now Cass spoke. "Typical," he said contemptuously. "Cheap and vicious and thoroughly typical of you and all you represent "

Skeffington shook his head slowly. "It won't work, Mr. Cass," he said. "I realize I'm supposed to redden with shame at the thought of playing dirty pool against a distinguished opponent like yourself, but it won't work Maybe it's because I remember who it is who every year



delivers a little statement about the plight of the people in our slums, but whose own large holdings in those slums are shabby buildings not fit for dogs. Or maybe it's because I remember who engineered the merger of the Consolidated Trust with the old Mason Street Trust in such a way that one of his partners and oldest friends was driven to suicide. But I don't want to waste the time of a busy man like yourself in these little asides, Mr. Cass. The main problem before us just now is that you seem to be in a bit of a situation. I'm still waiting to hear if you've thought of any suitable way out."

For a moment Cass did not answer at all, then he jerked his head forward once and rose quickly. "Very well," he said. "You'll get the money."

Skeffington nodded. "Bless my soul if I don't think you've found the way out. And I'll leave it to you to explain matters to your son, may I? You can point out to him the error of his ways. All evidence of his error will be handed over to you in the very near future. Say, for example, on the very day the loan comes through."

Cass, during this speech, had turned his back on Skeffington and had walked briskly to the door.

"Good-bye, Mr. Cass," Skeffington said. He added urbanely, "And give my best to the family."

It was the final insult, but Cass refused to be baited. He closed the door quickly but silently. He looked at the whispering, confidential knots of beefy men outside. Instinctively his mouth tightened, for he recognized in them the marauders who had come to sack his city and had remained to enjoy their plunder. Cass knew that direct control of the city was no longer possible to him and his associates, the big immigrations had ended that for ever. There was, however, the consolation of indirect control: Cass had found that few things were denied him who held the purse. No one held it more firmly than he.

Skeffington alone, among the invaders, was a dangerous antagonist. He was still, after all these years, something of a puzzle to Cass. It was a mystery how one so peculiarly maladroit in the ordinary ways of business—for whenever Skeffington, temporarily out of office, had ventured into the world of private enterprise, the results had been so calamitous as to often require a full term in office to restore him to his feet—should be so extraordinarily skilful in the management of his political affairs. Cass was well aware that men of almost childlike simplicity in their business lives may wind up in the highest political places. Even so, he was impressed by the extent of Skeffington's disasters. He was even more impressed by the extent of his success.

Cass resolved to get in touch with Amos Force immediately. He had been asked by the publisher to support the coalition behind young McCluskey; but he was attracted neither by this heterogeneous alliance nor by the young nonentity it was to back. To have committed his resources to such a group this morning would have been unthinkable;

to do so now was unavoidable. He would call Amos Force within the hour; he would declare himself in agreement. Arriving at the bank, he went directly to his son's office. Norman Cass Jr. looked up in astonishment. "Why, Dad," he said, "what a thurprithe!"

His father said ominously, "I imagine I should call you 'Mr. Commissioner.'"

The silly face flushed. "Then you know," his son said weakly. "I hadn't planned to tell you yet; I wanted you to be thurprithed."

"You were successful. I was surprised" And then, the stony self-control which had withstood the humiliating shafts of Skeffington broke down. *This is my son,* he thought, in a spasm of agony; aloud, he suddenly shouted: "You fool! You imbecile!"

For the next quarter of an hour, Norman Cass Jr. had a very bad time indeed.

In the mayor's office, Skeffington told Weinberg and Gorman of the satisfying conversation He said to Gorman, "I'm glad everything has worked out to your satisfaction, John. This couldn't be a better time for a housing development. It's a useful reminder that this administration is constantly concerned about better living for the electorate. Now what about our worthy opponents? Sam, you were dead right about the coalition; it seems to be shaping up nicely behind young McCluskey."

"Yeh," Weinberg said. "He's their dog okay. I've looked over our reports on McCluskey pretty thoroughly. We haven't come up with a thing, except that as a lawyer he's not much. He don't win many cases But he don't drink, he don't smoke, he goes home after work every night, he's in church every morning, and nobody ever told him any bad words The kid's clean as a whistle."

"This is news to chill the blood," Skeffington said. "In other years I was up against mere men; now it seems I'm fighting one of the angelic host. Well, let's not waste any more time looking into his past; he has no past. We have to get him for what he is today: a front man, a nice young spick-and-span front man with a shining face and clean hands. What we have to point out is that the nice young man is really the creature of the big bad boys in the back room. Not a Sir Galahad. a Pinocchio, a puppet fallen among thieves So we won't blast *him*. we'll blast the people behind him. What do you say to that?"

The old man smiled faintly. "There's always the danger he could pick up the sympathy vote. Everybody likes poor little lambs."

"Everybody likes the village idiot," Skeffington said, "but not as chief of police. Still, you're right, of course. We don't want to go too heavy on the pity or the ridicule; either can backfire on us. Sam, you're silent; does that indicate dissent?"

"Nah. I like it. You got this kid up there, you gotta do something with him, so why not make him out a dummy? He fits: the kid's a regular Charlie McCarthy. Only don't forget with all this talk about the poor little lamb that this one ain't so poor. He's got plenty of dollars behind him. Garvey's got no dough, but there's Cass and old man Force. And all those old dames in the Good Government bunch. They got nothin' else to do with their dough but leave it to cats. With a couple more like that behind him our dummy is sittin' on Fort Knox."

"Fair enough," said Skeffington imperturbably. "So we'll fight a wealthy little lamb instead of a poor one. It just takes a little more cash. I haven't seen the latest organization figures, but I assume all good men are coming to the aid of their party."

In financing his organization, Skeffington had installed a system of tithes. Each party worker who had been given employment gave the party, in return, a modest portion of his annual earnings. If he skipped a payment, he was visited by one of Weinberg's men and reminded. And if, after this, payment still lagged, the worker was subjected neither to violence nor to further reminder. He simply lost his job

"No complaints," Weinberg said. "Only one place is a little slow Sanitation. I dunno about that. Charlie Ragazza's over there."

"Maybe Charlie's taking a little for his private purposes? He plays the horses. Are the bookies into him?"

"Yeh. For how much I dunno."

"I'm told Charlie's been having his troubles," Gorman said meditatively, "but if he's taking it's got to be stopped and stopped now. This is going to be the most expensive campaign we've ever run; the television costs alone will run it up sky-high. We can't spare any money for Charlie. Or his bookie. Get him in here, Sam."

Weinberg nodded. "Okay. By the way, Governor, you talked with the truckers and contractors yet?"

"Yes. They're all right One of them was a little less than generous

at first, but I had a heart-to-heart talk with him. I told him that parsimony was wicked; I also touched briefly upon the unpleasant things that could happen to niggardly businessmen whose livelihood depended upon the good will of the city. I think we parted in an atmosphere of understanding. No, we won't have too much trouble raising the wherewithal to fight your rich little lamb, Sam. We might even have enough left over to take a few good swipes at his shepherds. I can hardly wait to begin!"

It was true. He sat there, smiling at his colleagues, an elderly warrior rejoicing in still another battle. The campaign was now ready to be taken to the public; from this moment on he would fall to with special zest. It was the beginning of the hard, joyous slugging match with old enemies; the wonderful preliminary to victory and four more years of political control. For Skeffington, this was truly the very best of times. He lit a cigar and said cheerfully, "We'll kick off on Thursday night at the rally at Davis Park; we're putting it on radio and television. Come early and bring your clippers; we're going to start shearing a lamb!"

CHAPTER 6

On Thursday evening, Adam watched his uncle on television. Maeve watched with him for a time, but she found the spectacle a source of the deepest discouragement. For one thing, it was so extremely well done. The speakers' platform was heavy with dignitaries from state and city government. Prominent also was Colonel Reuben Ballou, the city's only surviving veteran of the Civil War: like the American flag, this feeble centenarian was indispensable at all political gatherings. To his left sat three clergymen: Catholic, Protestant and Jew. Maeve was discomforted by this supportive presence of Religion; but it was the crowd itself, seeming to swell out into the farthest reaches of the park, that sent her into despair She sighed, "But who *are* they all?"

"Gangsters," Adam said lightly, "and lesser criminal elements from whom Uncle Frank derives his support. Good Democrats all. Or, to put it another way, the very same people who crowded this park to see Roosevelt ten years ago."

"That was *much* different," Maeve said.

Skeffington talked without a script and apparently without notes of

any kind. It was a masterly performance, a powerful statement of accomplishment in city housing, health services and recreation; it mentioned plans for the future; it contained an entertaining attack upon his opponents, with particular reference to McCluskey. When the speech was over, Adam realized that the opening of the campaign had been a brilliant success.

THE NEXT afternoon at the paper, he encountered the managing editor, plunging morosely along the corridor. Adam had not seen him for several days, and he noted that the aspect of pinched harassment that hung about him always now seemed more sharply defined. He said pleasantly, "Trying times, Ralph?"

"Ha ha," the managing editor said tonelessly. "Save that stuff for your uncle. He'll need it. Just wait."

But it was a spiritless rejoinder from a spiritless man, for the managing editor was finding these trying times indeed. Ever since the Skeffington announcement, Amos Force had been coming in to the paper daily, arriving early and staying late. The managing editor found his continued presence unnerving. Each day the old man wrote a new instalment in his serial exposé of Skeffington's past; and from his massive, ornate office came a stream of outrageous demands for increased speed, efficiency and action. From now until the end of the campaign, the managing editor was miserably aware that every day would be a living hell.

Adam went to his desk and began to work on his comic strip. For the moment he was stuck, and so were Little Simp and Daddy. Momentarily incautious in the Buenos Aires café, they had been seized upon orders from the hysterical waiter with the comic moustache and sent to a stone fortress outside the city, where they were given, each day, only a handful of local, inedible nuts. It was a diet suited only to Daddy the chipmunk; Little Simp was all too visibly wasting away. To circumvent the designs of the malevolent German was not easy; Adam had already rejected three possible solutions. However, he worked on, hoping for the best; and it was while he worked that Burbank, strangely absent all day, returned

"Hello, dear boy," he said. Adam, looking up automatically, almost gasped in his astonishment, for the Burbank who stood poised in the doorway was not the Burbank he knew. It was a different Burbank, a

radiant Burbank, a—or so it seemed—slightly drunken Burbank. His faintly seedy wardrobe had been miraculously enriched; he now stood arrayed in charcoal-grey jacket, pearl-grey trousers and a Tattersall waistcoat, the only familiar note the tired, parchment Burbank face.

"I'm staggered," Adam said truthfully. "Who is this king of glory?"

Burbank smiled but said nothing. He walked over to his desk. The great unopened pile of Scrambled Letters mail awaited him; he reached out and, before Adam's amazed eyes, pushed it all into the waste-paper basket. Then he lit a match and dropped it into the pile.

"Burbank!" Adam cried. He jumped up and tipped over the basket. The burning letters fell across the floor; a few seconds of frantic stamping, and the fire was out. Adam said, "Have you gone crazy?"

"No, dear boy, Burbank is not crazy. This was just my little joke. Because, dear boy, I resigned, bag and baggage, from our *dear* paper, not five minutes ago!"

Adam was aghast. He said, "But why? I'm sure you know what you're doing, but I hope you haven't burned all your bridges."

"Every last one. Thanks, I may say, to you. Our little talk about your uncle stirred up memories of the dear dead days, and yesterday I paid a visit to City Hall. Your uncle extended a very kind offer of employment, and I took it."

Adam stared at him. "You're working for my uncle?"

"I shall write speeches and news releases, and I begin work soon on a *dreadful* attack on dear Mr. Force." He did a little dance step and almost fell. Adam rose to help him, but was stopped with a gesture as Burbank regained his balance.

"I have been drinking," he said, "but I am definitely *not* drunk. Except with joy."

Adam said, "Look, Burbank, I'm delighted, but how about the permanency of this new job?"

"A position will be ready and waiting for me when your uncle is continued in office. And he will be!" Burbank in his eccentric progress had reached the door; he paused and said with peculiar solemnity: "Your uncle, dear boy, is a gifted man and a formidable campaigner, and his opponents are nothing more than ciphers As I may have told you, I *like* your uncle He is a rascal, but he is something those cold-blooded monsters upstairs will never be: *he is a human being.* Do you

know what he said to me yesterday? He put his hand on my shoulder and said, 'Edgar, come aboard. You're an able man and I'd be delighted to have your services' And that was the first time in twenty years," Burbank said, steadying himself once more, "that *anyone* has told me that I was an able man or that he wanted me around. And now I'll say farewell."

With a jaunty, joyous wave of the hand, he was gone. On an impulse, Adam decided to telephone his uncle. He was put through immediately

"You must be clairvoyant," Skeffington said. "I was just about to give you a ring. I thought that you might take a little trip with me this evening to the other side of the city. What you'll see isn't exactly part of the campaign, but it's the kind of background that might interest you. What do you say?"

Weeks had gone by since the meeting between Adam and his uncle in City Hall, but Skeffington had remained mysteriously silent. In the meantime, Adam's old distaste for becoming involved in politics—and for any conflict with Maeve—had reasserted itself. Here, now, was the moment of invitation; it was now that he could extricate himself from the promise rashly made. Instead, he found himself saying: "I'd like to very much What time?"

"Oh, say seven-thirty. Where'll I pick you up: at your office?"

"Yes." It was his habit to work late one night a week. Just in time he remembered the purpose of his call; he said, "Uncle Frank, Burbank just dropped in He told me that he's left the paper and is working for you. Exactly what will he do?"

"What he's told," Skeffington said, with a rather frightening candour. Then he chuckled. "Don't worry; he'll be all right I'll see to it. And I'll also see you. At seven-thirty. Good-bye."

Adam hung up slowly. About Burbank he now felt to some extent reassured; about himself, he still had serious misgivings.

"We're going to Knocko Minihan's wake," Skeffington announced as Adam got into the long official car that evening.

"A wake?"

"Surprised? I imagine you aren't in the habit of visiting deceased strangers. But, in its way, a wake can be quite an occasion."

Adam said, "I've been to a few wakes Not many, but a few."

"Probably not like this one, however. Nobody liked Knocko."

"Then there will be a fairly slim attendance tonight?"

"Not at all," said Skeffington. "The place'll be crowded to the doors. He married a grand woman, a friend of your Aunt Kate's. And there are other factors involved. . . . Ah, here we are."

They got out and entered a tenement house. A heavy-set woman, dressed in black, and with the face of some large and extremely suspicious bird, came out of the darkness to greet them.

"Hello, Frank," she said.

"Hello, Agnes. Mrs. Burns, my nephew, Adam Caulfield, Mary's boy. How's Gert taking it?"

"Pretty good. She cries a little," said the woman. In explanation she added, "She remembers all the nice things he done."

"She has a remarkable memory," Skeffington said dryly.

Mrs. Burns pointed to a door on the right of the narrow hall.

"He's in the parlour," she said. "There's no one in there now; it's still a bit early. Go right in, Frank. He looks lovely."

Adam followed Skeffington into a tall, glum parlour, full of rows of metal chairs. At the far end, decorated with wreaths and floral sprays, was a grey coffin; to Adam it seemed huge, a sarcophagus fit for a giant. He advanced upon it with his uncle; they knelt in prayer by its side and Adam saw Knocko in death. He was a diminutive man lost in the recesses of his mighty container. His small hands were folded across his chest, clasping a rosary, and over the coffin a large crucifix, heavily studded with rhinestones, had been suspended. Someone of ingenious mind—undoubtedly the undertaker, thought Adam—had fixed a baby spotlight so that it played full upon the crucifix; high above Knocko's final, alien smile, the rhinestones glittered and danced.

Skeffington, after a moment, got to his feet, looking at the crucifix. "A lavish display," he said. "And you couldn't get the man near a theatre in his life." He put his hand lightly on Adam's shoulder. "Will you do me a favour and stay here a moment? I have to go in and say a word to the widow."

Adam nodded although he was scarcely happy over the prospect of the solitary vigil. He moved towards the back of the room, as far as possible from the dead Knocko, the rhinestones and the baby spotlight, and sat down to await his uncle's return.

Suddenly, from somewhere to his right, there came a *"Sssst!"*

He jumped. In a corner darker than the rest of the room he saw a small, puckered woman, peering out at him with lively eyes. "Did I *scare* you?" she said with delight. "I was here in my corner when you come in with Frank. Are you the nephew?"

Adam nodded. With the discovery of this silent watcher of the shadows a new dimension of eeriness seemed to enter the room.

"I'm Delia Boylan," she said "I knew your pa and I knew your ma and I knew you when you was a baby. You was homely as spit."

"Ah," said Adam How did one respond more fully to such frankness? He said, changing the subject hopefully, "I'm surprised there are so few people here to see Mr. Minihan."

"Ah, they'll be in," she said confidently. "They'll all want to get a good last look at old Knocko." She raised herself to a half-standing posture and gazed critically at the coffin. "He looks grand with the cheeks all puffed out, don't he?" she asked.

"He looks very nice," Adam said. "I didn't know him."

Mrs Boylan shrugged in contempt "A little runt of a man. Thin as a snake and no colour to him at all. Ah well, God be good to the man. He was mean as a panther, but good luck to him." She moved abruptly in her chair to face the door *"Sssst!"* she hissed.

Adam followed her glance. He saw a stout, balding young man, spruce and smooth in the discreet clothing of his profession. In response to Delia's frantically beckoning hand he came over to them with an obvious reluctance. "Johnnie Degnan, the undertaker," Delia said to Adam. "Frank Skeffington's nephew, Johnnie. The sister's boy."

"Very pleased to meet you, sir," the undertaker said. "I've always been a great admirer of your uncle. I hope to make his acquaintance tonight."

Delia grabbed Degnan's sleeve. "Johnnie," she said, "you laid him out in the *big* coffin! Ah, you rascal, you!" She gave a little whoop of laughter. "Wouldn't it kill the man if he knew!"

The undertaker gave her a look of pain. "Mr. Minihan was a very prominent figure in the community Very prominent."

"He was the cheapest old devil that ever lived," Delia said. "And you know it. Well, you done an elegant job on him, Johnnie." As a grace note she added, "No matter what you charge."

"Ah ha ha ha," said the undertaker tonelessly, giving Adam a nervous smile. "Well, I must go along. Many duties. A pleasure to have met you, sir." He bowed and hurried away on muted feet.

"There's a great rogue," Delia said approvingly. "Only thirty years old and he'd steal the skin off your bones. Just give him the chance and it's the big coffin, ten limousines, and the Holy Name Choir to sing you good-bye "

"And is he responsible for the crucifix?" Adam asked, pointing to the dazzling object above the coffin.

"The pride and joy," she assured him "It all goes on the bill. *Sssst!*"

The sound, while no longer unfamiliar, was unexpected; Adam jumped again. An angular woman of forbidding aspect had come into the room and was now making hand signals to Delia.

"Aggie Gormley," Delia said. "I wonder has she news about the will? I'd best go see. I'll be back in a minute."

She hustled away, and Adam was alone once more. He wondered when his uncle would return. Rather to his surprise, he did not care; in this pre-sepulchral room and in the appalling company of Delia Boylan, he was undoubtedly enjoying himself.

SKEFFINGTON had gone to the small, neat kitchen; there, dressed in black, was the tall, stooped figure of his wife's old friend. She was still a pretty woman, but very faded; life with Knocko, thought Skeffington, must have been a fading experience. A quick rush of pity came over him "I'm sorry, Gert," he said.

"I know you are, Frank " Obviously she had been weeping. Skeffington sat down opposite her at the kitchen table.

"Gert, I want to have a little talk with you on practical matters. I know you don't feel much like discussing anything like that now, but I want you to Will you do that for me?"

There was a faint nod "I will, Frank," she said.

"That's the girl Now, first of all, do you have any idea of how you're situated? I know Knocko had nothing in the bank; he told me that himself. Was there any insurance?"

"There was some," she said, "but I think it's gone· they were charging too much for the premiums." She began to cry again, quietly. "He was a good man, Frank, but he had such bad luck."

"Yes." Bad luck, he thought, which had lasted no less than fifty years: a new world's record. It was tragic· this once-lively, once-lovely woman left old and beaten and penniless, thanks to her marriage to a dour, improvident boob. And yet she had loved him. It was utterly irrational, and, he thought ironically, it happened all the time.

"Well, Gert," he said, "I guess now's the time to make good on a promise." He reached into an inner pocket of his coat and brought out an envelope. "Just before Kate died, she left me a little present for you, but she said I was to hold on to it until I was sure you really needed it I guess you could say that time is now." He handed her the envelope; it was only when she felt the contents slipping out that she looked down. In her lap were ten one-hundred-dollar bills. She said instantly, "I won't take it, Frank. Thank you, but I won't. I saw Kate before she died. She said nothing about leaving me any money. That money comes from you, Frank, and God bless you for it But I won't take it."

It was no more than he had expected; the manœuvre of the imaginary legacy was ridiculously transparent. But he had no time; it would have to do He said briskly, "Listen to me, Gert. If you don't take it, I'll get rid of it, nobody'll get it It was Kate's gift to you and you alone." He took her hand, and said insistently, "Come on, Gert. No false pride Take it. It's yours."

Her tired old eyes looked at him steadily "*Was* it Kate's, Frank? *Is* it mine? Do you swear it?"

"I do, Gert," he said solemnly And he knew that he had won.

She took the money, holding it awkwardly in her lap. Looking up at Skeffington she smiled with an odd, almost a young, shyness "God bless you, Frank," she said

"Why, I hope He will," he said, "but hardly for this. All blessings go to Kate, and I'm sure she doesn't need them by now." He got up and patted her on the hand "I'm going back to the parlour now. You ought to come out yourself a little later."

"I will, Frank. I suppose they'll come tonight? There haven't been many up to now" She added defiantly, "He was a difficult man in his way, but he had many friends, Frank"

"He had indeed," Skeffington said reassuringly. "They've just been waiting for this final night, Gert. You'll see Your only difficulty will be to fit them all in."

As he walked from the room, he thought: Poor woman. If friendship with Knocko were to be the basis for attendance at his wake, it could have been held in a phone booth. But that afternoon, Skeffington had issued orders to all city department heads that delegations were to be sent to the wake. And he had let it be known that he himself would be at hand . . .

He came back into the parlour to discover that the crowd had begun to arrive; as he entered the room the heads turned towards him at once. He looked for Adam and signalled to him; Adam approached, only slightly behind Delia Boylan.

"Ah now, Frank," she said eagerly, "how is she taking it?"

"As well as could be expected." He added dryly, "I'm happy to see that you're bearing up under the strain, Delia."

A derisive whoop of laughter rang through the gloomy room. "I'll live," Delia said. "Well, me and the nephew has been having a lovely talk about poor Knocko, the old devil."

"I wish I'd been here to join you," Skeffington said. Turning to Adam he added, "Mrs. Boylan has a splendid attendance record at the deathbed of her many friends."

"I go to them all," she said proudly. "I don't miss a one."

"Everybody has to have a hobby," Skeffington said. "If you'll excuse us, Delia, I want to take my nephew into the next room and introduce him to some people. We'll leave you to your prayers."

Out in the hall, Adam said. "Does she really spend all her time going to wakes?"

"Apart from a few hours of sleep each night, I believe she does. It's cheaper than going to the movies."

While they stood in the hall, more people came in, and Adam was struck by the altered deportment of his uncle; it was as if, from being one of the visiting mourners, he had suddenly become the host. He spoke to all the new arrivals, and all responded in identical fashion: a muttered acknowledgment of the pitiful fact of Knocko's death, followed by a more fervent statement of good wishes for the coming election. A short, round woman approached them with slow, heavy steps.

"Glad to see you, Annie," Skeffington said. "Everything get here all right?"

"It did, Frank. Coffee and tea, sandwiches and cake. God knows

where we can put it, with Gert in the kitchen. I don't like to bother the poor woman."

"Go right ahead and bother her," Skeffington said decisively. "She needs something to take her mind off things. See if you can't get her to come in here, just to go through the motions."

"All right, Frank, I will." The woman went down the hall with her weighty tread, and Skeffington, who had been noting with some amusement his nephew's polite attempt to conceal his curiosity, said, "That's a role I occasionally practise: the combination physician, caterer and master of ceremonies. I might have to fall back on it one day when I retire from politics."

"I hadn't realized," Adam said, "that all this was a part of your job."

"Well, this is rather a special case. The widow's an old friend, so I just had a few things sent over." Actually, the food had come from the ample commissariat of the Wadsworth Hospital. As this was a city institution, it was, in fact, a tax-supported wake.

They now entered a room in which many more people—exclusively male—stood talking and smoking. When Skeffington came in they surged round him, and Adam was soon separated from his uncle by a tight, struggling double ring of the self-appointed palace guard. He was again on his own.

His first encounter was with Ditto Boland. "Good evening, Adam," he said, panting slightly. The heat of the evening and his own obesity had been hard on Ditto. "Well, well, and isn't this a grand evening, Adam? A very spirited occasion, as we say. Apart from the unhappy death of poor Knocko, that is."

"I suppose Mr. Minihan was a friend of yours?"

"Knocko? Oh, yes, yes. Of course he wasn't in politics like the Governor and myself so I didn't see so much of him through the years. We weren't on the intimately bosom basis, but we were friendly. A very lovable man, Adam. Everybody loved him."

"That's curious. I had the idea that he wasn't terribly popular."

"Is that so now, Adam? Is that really so? And from who might you get an idea like that, might I ask?"

Rather unfairly, Adam said, "From my uncle."

"And who would know better?" Ditto said instantly. "You can't beat the Governor when it comes to sizing a man up. I remember he

spotted the mean streak in Knocko the first time he met him. He said to me personally at the time, he said, 'Ditto, the man has a bad eye.' But," he said largely, "forgive and forget: that's always been the Governor's grand motto, and mine has been as per the same. That's why the two of us are here tonight."

"You must be an old hand at these wakes, Ditto," Adam said.

"Yes yes, Adam. I've been to some grand wakes in my time I remember the time I went with the Governor over to Danno Herlihy's wake. You remember Danno, no doubt, Adam—the Assistant Water Commissioner with the deaf ear. That was a grand wake, Adam. One and all had a grand time. There was turkey, ham, roast beef, potato salad and some lovely brisket." Ditto smacked his lips *in memoriam,* and turned to discuss the campaign with another old familiar from Skeffington's outer office.

Adam could not help marvelling at the completeness of Knocko's failure to dominate, or even to intrude upon, his own wake. The more one considered this neglect, Adam thought, the more callous one discovered it to be, and despite his resolutions to be prepared for all developments he was somewhat shocked by this one.

Old John Gorman had been standing to the left of the ring surrounding Skeffington, talking to petitioners with more modest requests. Now he came across the room, a remarkably neat old man, straight as a string, and drew Adam to one side. He said softly, "Well now, did Ditto tell you all about politics?"

"Not quite," Adam said. He was slightly abashed by the question, which seemed to place him in the undesirable relation of pupil to such a dubious tutor. He added, "Although the subject does seem to come up at this wake, Mr. Gorman."

"Ah, well, that's natural enough," the old man said mildly. "If you met the Pope here you'd talk about religion."

Adam smiled. "Still, wouldn't we also talk a bit about Knocko Minihan?"

"It would be the pious thing to do," Gorman agreed. "But then, if you both knew Knocko, you might want to talk about almost anything else. Out of respect for the dead, you might say."

"Yes, I see But what I don't see is this if Knocko was such a generally disliked man, why are so many people here tonight?"

"They came as you did yourself. For the very same reason," the old man said thoughtfully.

Adam stared at him. "You mean because of Uncle Frank?"

"Well, there's some, of course, that came on the widow's account: Gert's a fine woman, and has her friends. And there may be a few came for Knocko himself; they say," he said wryly, "there's saints amongst us even today. But most of them came for the one reason: they knew your uncle was to come."

"And so," Adam said, "naturally business goes on as usual?" His feeling of shock had increased; the whole business, he decided, was a really appalling mixture of hypocrisy and hardness.

"You have things a little twisty," the old man said softly. "You're a bit hard on your uncle, I think The man has no need to go to wakes if he wants to collect a crowd about him; all he has to do is stop on a street corner to light his cigar and fifty people come out of the cement to say, 'Hello, Frank, and what can you do for me today?' He came here to bring a crowd to Knocko's wake so the widow would feel a little better. So the boys have a little food and they talk a little politics, and I don't know that they do a great amount of harm with either. And then when they all kneel down to pray for Knocko, there'll be ten times the people here praying for him as would be here without your uncle and all the chatter about politics. And I have the suspicion that Knocko's in no mood to throw away any prayers from friend or foe. So," he concluded, his mild blue eyes resting on Adam's face, and his lips twisted into a just perceptible smile, "don't be too hard on us, boy. It's no terrible thing that's being done."

Adam felt his face growing redder with Gorman's every word It was a quiet, paternal reproof: humiliating and, far worse, justified. Apologetically he said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Gorman. I'm afraid I'll have to plead stupidity and some pretty bad manners"

The old man moved a hand slightly. "Ah," he said mysteriously, "it's all a lot of nothing. You'll do, right enough." He began to look slowly about the room, watching for developments that might have taken place while he had been talking: one of these was in the doorway even now. He said to Adam, "Now that man over by the door—d'ye know him?"

Adam saw a short, stout man with protuberant eyes, dressed in a

rumpled grey suit. He came towards them with curious little skating steps.

"Hello, my dear man," he said to Gorman. "You're looking very well, John. a nice, even, healthy colour. That speaks of a good circulation. Marvellous! The blood's the thing. And this must be Frank's nephew, Adam Caulfield I'm Charles Hennessey, my dear man. I read you daily in the funny papers. Nice drawing, a good sense of humour. Well," he said, turning again to Gorman, "I see the boss still has the grand touch! The most unpopular man in the ward dies and almost before he's cool there's a mob scene round the casket shouting, 'Three cheers for Skeffington for mayor!' Getting votes out of Knocko, like getting blood out of the turnip Oh, clever! My hat's off to the man!"

Adam looked up sharply as this extraordinary man voiced the charge he himself had made But now Gorman merely seemed amused; he said simply, "Ah, that's all moonshine, Charlie."

"All truth!" Charlie said "It's a matter of public record that Frank Skeffington has been campaigning at wakes for fifty years."

Skeffington had been moving unhurriedly towards them for the past few moments, stopping to talk to newcomers Charlie caught sight of him now. "How are you, my dear man?" he said. "You're looking well They tell me you're on the low-salt diet. Don't put too much faith in it, my dear man. No no no! That's what Billy McGrath was on and he perspired himself to death."

"I'll try to avoid that fate if possible, Charlie How's your campaign coming along? I hear you've got the sound-truck out."

"Yes, yes, I'm telling them the facts about you, my dear man. I watched you on television last night; I took down every word you said on the tape-recorder It doesn't stand up, my dear man A grand first impression, but when you play it all back a second or third time you realize the lack of substance there."

"Charlie, that's unfair," Skeffington said reproachfully. "You listened I only hope you don't start a trend. Suppose everybody suddenly began to listen to what was being said in political speeches? But now," he went on to the room at large, "I think we're all going to have to quiet down. Knocko's widow'll be in here any moment I suggest that you extend your sympathies briefly, and then move out to the kitchen where there are refreshments I also suggest," he said meaningfully, "that you

stay around for the Rosary. A few prayers won't kill you, and some of you may actually enjoy the sensation of being on your knees for a change."

"Marvellous!" Charlie said. "The swiftness and dispatch of it! Marching orders! I hand it to you, my dear man. Marvellous!"

AFTER the Rosary was over, Skeffington swiftly and efficiently made the rounds, saying the necessary good-byes. Uncle and nephew had almost reached the front door when Skeffington said, "Hold on a minute, Adam. I want a word with that undertaker before we go."

They both turned and saw the head of Johnnie Degnan, poking out of the kitchen; obviously he had been watching their departure Skeffington beckoned, and he came running quietly to them. "Ah, good evening, Governor," he said, in his hushed tones. "A very sad occasion. I wanted to see you before, but the pressure of my duties didn't allow. I'm John Degnan, Governor."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Degnan," Skeffington said. "As you say, it's a sad occasion. I'm happy to see you've done your best by it. However, you don't mind if I say that I was rather struck by the fact that the coffin and the décor seem a trifle splendid for someone who was in decidedly modest circumstances?"

The undertaker smiled; it was, Adam thought, a nervous smile. "I see what you mean, Governor," he said swiftly. "Yet I always think the family is more satisfied if the final homage, as I like to think of it, is really nice in its every aspect."

"Why, those are the feelings of an artist," Skeffington said. "They do you credit, Mr. Degnan I presume you've discussed all this with Mrs. Minihan?"

"Well, no, Governor. I thought it best not to in her distraught condition. I always believe in taking as many worries as possible from the shoulders of the family."

"That's very thoughtful of you. Now then, you're a young man, Mr. Degnan, but I understand you've had quite a bit of professional experience. What would you say was the lowest price you've ever buried anyone for?"

"The lowest *price*, Governor?" The smile wavered uncertainly. "I don't believe I've ever quite worked that out."

"Try," Skeffington urged him. "Make a rough estimate. Would it be . . . oh, say thirty-five dollars?"

"Thirty-five dollars!" The undertaker looked wildly at Skeffington. "You couldn't *begin* to bury anyone for that price today!"

"I'll bet you could if you really tried," Skeffington said pleasantly. "And just to justify my confidence, Mr. Degnan, why don't you do that very thing with Mr. Minihan?"

"But, Governor, you can't be serious!" Degnan cried. The smooth round face had become agonized; the soft hands were united in front of him in a tight, beseeching clasp. "The costs are going up every day. I couldn't possibly do it. It's——"

Skeffington pulled out his watch and examined it with apparent surprise. "It's later than I thought," he said. "Well, Mr. Degnan, I'll leave the details to you. A suitable funeral, conducted for thirty-five dollars, with no cutting of corners. I know you'll do a grand job. In any event, I'll be sure to hear about it: my observers will give me a full report."

The undertaker's face, which for some moments had been the colour of putty, had now turned a vivid red. "But, Governor! What you're asking is *impossible!"*

"I've always believed that nothing is impossible when one has youth and ambition," Skeffington said reprovingly. "I hope you won't be the one to shake this treasured belief. Because if you do," he said, regarding Degnan with a stare which its recipient suddenly found to be as unpleasant as anything he had ever experienced, "you might shake my confidence in you. What's worse, you might even begin to shake the confidence of the members of the licensing board for your profession. Well, we mustn't keep you from your labours any longer. Good night, Mr. Degnan."

They went out of the door and down the steps; Degnan's anguished voice trailed after them to their car. "Thirty-five dollars!" it wailed. . .

When they were under way, Skeffington said: "I didn't think we'd be in there quite so long. I hope you weren't bored."

"No, no. Far from it." Adam thought for a moment, looking back over the evening. There were a number of questions he wanted very much to ask his uncle. He said only, "I had the idea from somewhere, Uncle Frank, that wakes used to be pretty violent affairs. Didn't some of them actually become brawls?"

Skeffington's heavy face assumed a mildly shocked expression; then his lips twitched slightly. "Of course you're right," he said. "In the old days there was drinking and sometimes things got a little rough. But I think you have to see those wakes in the light of the times, when life wasn't exactly a picnic for our people. They were a sociable people but they didn't get much chance for sociability They were poor, they worked hard and they didn't have much in the way of diversion. Actually, the only place people got together was at the wake. All in all, I've always thought the wake was a grand custom."

Adam said, "I hadn't thought of it as being a kind of *relief* from grimness. But what about now, Uncle Frank? Those same conditions don't exist, do they?"

"No," said Skeffington, "and neither does the wake It's a disappearing phenomenon, like the bowler hat. Well, I mustn't start talking. It's late, and you're probably eager to get home."

For the first time Adam noticed that the car had stopped and that they were in front of his house. He said, "Uncle Frank, thanks loads for the evening. I've had a fine time, really."

"When something else comes up that I think you should take a look at, I'll give you a ring. That is, of course, if you'd like me to."

"Please do, Uncle Frank. And again, thanks for tonight "

"A pleasure," Skeffington said "Remember me to your wife."

Skeffington's final words made Adam realize with a start that he had not once thought of Maeve during the evening As he entered the house, he reflected that she would at last have to be told about his new relationship with her enemy, his uncle.

CHAPTER 7

It was the next night that Adam told Maeve his news. They had spent the evening quietly at home, and now, in bed, as she lay relaxed and warm and fragrant in his arms, he decided that it was the time for revelation. He said, "Maeve, I didn't tell you what happened to me last night."

Half asleep, she murmured, "What did happen?"

"I went to a wake. A huge wake on the other side of the city. With none other than Uncle Frank."

He felt her body stir at the name, and he knew that instantly she had become wide awake He began to talk with greater speed, telling her about Knocko's wake in some detail. He took care to play down the name of Skeffington, and to emphasize the strange and comic aspects of the evening. After a while he was rewarded with a small, subdued giggle.

"But why was your uncle there?" Maeve said. "And why should he have thought that you'd be so interested in the wake?"

It was time to get on with his case. Omitting nothing, he told her in full detail of his talk, weeks before, with his uncle. "What it amounts to,' he concluded, "is that I'll spend a fair amount of time with Uncle Frank during the next couple of months. I know that's not exactly your idea of how the growing young husband should pass his time, but it's probably Uncle Frank's last big push, and I'd like to see him in action. And for some strange reason he'd like to have me. So," he said, looking down at her and smoothing back her hair, "what do you say to that, Maeve?"

"Well," she said, "why not?"

He was astonished "Do you mean that?"

She nodded resolutely. "If you really want to."

He held her close and said softly, "Ah, you're a good girl, Maeve. It's only for a few weeks; it'll all turn out fine."

It would have astonished Adam still more had he known that he owed this victory chiefly to his old opponent, his father-in-law. Although Maeve was young, she was neither stupid nor unobservant, and during the recent weeks she had seen her husband's rising—if surreptitious—interest in the Skeffington campaign. Uncertain of her exact course in handling this, she had gone to her father.

He had given somewhat surprising counsel. "I thought something like this might happen," he said. "If Adam has the idea that he wants to get closer to his uncle, my advice is to let him: in fact, encourage him. Skeffington has a certain superficial attractiveness which can sometimes fool intelligent young fellows like Adam. But it's been my experience that as soon as all really intelligent people come to grips with Skeffington they realize what he is and refuse to have anything more to do with him."

He had patted her hand encouragingly and she had gone away

somewhat comforted though vaguely dissatisfied. The result had been tonight's bedroom scene of soft acceptance. Now, cradled in Adam's arms, she was happy but not entirely so: she looked to the future with love for her husband, faith in her father, and—faint but persistent—a few small whispering doubts of her own.

As THE campaign moved from the shadows into full public view, Skeffington was busier than he had been at any time in the past four years, for the burden of electioneering was now added to the routine of each day. This burden included problems unsuspected by Adam. It included, for example, the case of Johnnie Byrne, which Skeffington decided to settle abruptly one afternoon. He summoned Byrne to his office for a private talk. Byrne was a City Council man: a slight, pleasant-looking man in his forties with a small mouth and gentle eyes. "Good afternoon, Governor," he said jauntily—so jauntily that Skeffington immediately said to himself: he's nervous. "You want to see me?"

"I do," Skeffington said. "You've been out of the city for two weeks, Johnnie. I hear you went to Baltimore. Pleasure trip?"

"No no, business," Byrne said quickly. "I wanted to take a look at their port facilities. I heard that they had their water-front problems pretty well licked, and I thought maybe I could pick up a few tips. I came back definitely encouraged." The small mouth formed a frank, open smile. "Frank, I felt so good about it, you know what I forgot to do? I forgot to charge the city for the trip. I'll have to do that the first thing tomorrow morning."

Skeffington looked at him bleakly. "No soap," he said. "It won't wash, Johnnie."

This time the reply did not come so quickly. "Hah?" Byrne said. A new expression came into the gentle eyes for just an instant; it disappeared and the frank smile popped into place once more. "What's the matter, Frank?" he said. "It was official business; I'm entitled to reimbursement."

"Stop it," Skeffington said wearily. "You're lying to me, Johnnie. You went to Baltimore all right, but not about port facilities. Your wife has been in to see me. You went to Baltimore to chase a girl. I can tell you who the girl was, where you stayed and what you did. So you can stop all this nonsense about port facilities. I don't like being lied to."

Byrne's soft, pleasant face seemed to retreat before each blunt word; panic now started in the gentle eyes "I swear to God," he began, and then stopped, as if realizing that the rushing words of denial would serve no purpose.

"I've warned you about this before, Johnnie," Skeffington went on. "You've got a good wife and a fine family, yet you go chasing round after every stray skirt that passes through town."

Byrne said despairingly, "Ah, lay off the lecture, will you, Frank? It's all I get day and night from her."

Skeffington nodded grimly. "This is a different kind of lecture. I don't like what you've done to your wife, but that's none of my business. What is my business is what you've done to me."

"What I did to *you?*" Byrne cried. Panic was now crossed with bewilderment. "May God strike me dead if I did anything to you, Frank!" he cried. "All right, it was a dirty trick on Irene, I admit it. I don't know what comes over me, Frank. It seems like I can't help myself, somehow. But I swear the whole thing has nothing to do with you, Frank! It is a private matter, a family affair. . . "

"Everybody in your ward knows you're one of my men," Skeffington said curtly. "Now you suddenly wind up in the middle of a first-class scandal right before Election Day; how many votes do you think that'll lose me?"

"But I've got the ward in the palm of my hand!"

"You won't have now," Skeffington said inexorably, "because you've done the one thing you can't do with our people and get away with it You're a married man who's been fooling around, Johnnie, and your wife is going to divorce you. And don't deny it," he said sharply, as the pale pink lips started to move. "I know she's moved out and is living with her mother. I know she's been to see Father Casey, and that she's going to sue for a civil divorce. Your ward is going to repudiate you so fast you won't be able to catch your breath. Which leaves only one course open to me, Johnnie. I'm going to repudiate you first."

"For the love of God!" Byrne cried. "You wouldn't, Frank. . . ."

"I would," Skeffington said simply. "I just did. Now. You're finished, Johnnie. I mean it."

Byrne made a curious whimpering sound. "You've got to give me another chance, Frank. Listen, I'll fix it up with Irene. . . ."

"You're fixing it up with nobody," Skeffington said wearily. "I've warned you about this half a dozen times, and each time I got your promise. You're a weak sister, Johnnie, and you've got to go."

He stopped, for the soft face confronting him had gone into boneless collapse, and Byrne had begun to sob. Skeffington watched him, more in distaste than in pity. Like the voters who would now turn sharply against the guilty Byrne, Skeffington took a poor view of marital infidelity. It was perhaps the single offence with which he had never been charged by his opponents.

"All right, Johnnie," he said finally. "You can go now."

Byrne went, shuffling slowly, and Skeffington turned to the work he had to do. It was late in the afternoon when John Gorman entered and said, "Johnnie Byrne dropped in to see me."

Skeffington nodded. "I thought he might."

"It's a shame this had to happen," Gorman said. "You did what you had to do, but a thing like this always means trouble."

"It does," Skeffington agreed. "But all the sympathy will be with the wife, once the news about the divorce gets out."

"Ah, it's hard on the woman," Gorman said reflectively. "Will she squeeze enough out of Johnnie to get along on, d'ye think?"

"I hope the good judge'll see to that," Skeffington said. "Meanwhile, we'd better see that she doesn't want for anything. As for Johnnie, he's able-bodied; he can go to work. It'll be a change, but he can do it."

SKEFFINGTON'S day, as usual now, was a long one. He rose, as always, early, but now, more often than not, he retired late. Too late, he thought grimly, as he noted that on several nights his arrival home had coincided roughly with that of his son.

"I almost feel I should apologize," he said when he discovered that his son, for the second time that week, had beaten him to their home. "I hope I'm not damaging you in the eyes of your friends?"

"Damaging, Dad?" his son said, with a puzzled smile. "I don't get it. What's the scoop?"

"Well, word might get round that you were getting in before your father. A whispering campaign of that kind might not do an ambitious young night owl any good. But I'm a little busy these nights. You see, there's talk that we're going to have an election in November.

If we are, I want to be prepared. I wouldn't want it to sneak up on me."

Faint lines of perplexity touched the boyish face. "Sure we're having an election in November. The first Tuesday. Teddy Thornton was talking about it only tonight."

"You can't keep a secret from Teddy," Skeffington said. "Well, if that's the case, I guess I'll get some sleep and rest up for it. Good night."

"Good night, Dad."

Skeffington went to bed. He felt spasms of fatigue: his bones seemed to expand and contract within his aching flesh. He was doing too much; he knew it, but he knew too that any reduction in activity was impossible. Ironically, thanks to such modern technological advances as radio and television, the going was immeasurably tougher than it had been twenty-five years before, when he had been twenty-five years younger. He used radio and television exhaustively, but he did not consider them a substitute for personal contact. Instead, he added the new techniques to the old, and thus acquired a schedule heavier than any he had attempted before.



As THE DAYS went by, Adam spent more and more time in his uncle's company. Skeffington would telephone and suggest that Adam, if he were interested, might meet him in fifteen minutes: there was to be some piece of campaign activity which he might find rewarding. Whatever the notice, Adam responded, for the flexibility of his own day eliminated conflicts at the paper.

Skeffington's campaigning criss-crossed the sprawling old city by routes he had travelled for half a century. He knew the city block by block, almost

building by building, and he had noted each population shift in detail. As the Yankees had moved in indignant retreat before the Irish, as the Irish had done likewise before the Italians, as the succeeding if much smaller invasions of Greek, Syrian and Chinese had worked their minor dislocations, Skeffington had marked them all with sustained care. Now Adam followed him up narrow, crooked streets into musty lodge halls, into dark little basements where a smiling Chinese shook hands with Skeffington over a partially ironed shirt, into long narrow stores with hanging rows of salamis and herbs and cheeses, into tall, dirty, dangerous tenement buildings, bursting with families. In these few short weeks, Adam began to appreciate the size of his uncle's task; campaigning, even for one of his uncle's great experience, was no easy matter.

One day, he accompanied his uncle to a radio station. Here, every day, Skeffington delivered a mid-morning broadcast to the housewives; it had been a valued tactic for years. Entering the studio, Adam saw that his uncle's chief secretary, Tom Lacy, had arrived before them; he was arranging a series of papers across the table on which the microphone rested.

"The script?" Adam asked his uncle.

"No no," Skeffington said. He pulled from his pocket a clipping, torn from the morning's paper. "This'll do for a script. We don't want to get too formal. Those are just papers I have to sign; the city has to conduct its business even during a campaign."

Adam watched while his uncle seated himself and began to read and sign the papers rapidly. One he lifted and gave back to the secretary, saying cryptically, "Not a chance." Adam looked at the clock. The broadcast was to begin at eleven; it was now ten fifty-eight, and there were no signs of preparation. But promptly at one minute before broadcast time, Skeffington passed the last paper over. "All right," he said. "Now: we go to the docks after this?"

"That's right, Governor."

"Did Sam Weinberg get back from Washington?"

"Just about an hour ago, Governor. He saw McArdle and apparently everything went very well. I've arranged for Sam and John Gorman to come in at two thirty this afternoon. You have the Bird Lovers' Society at twelve thirty."

"It's a shame that robins haven't got the vote," Skeffington said. He

glanced at the clock for the first time. "Well," he said, standing, "I guess we're just about set to say a few words to the good ladies." He walked over to the microphone and placed the ragged newspaper clipping on the reading stand next to it.

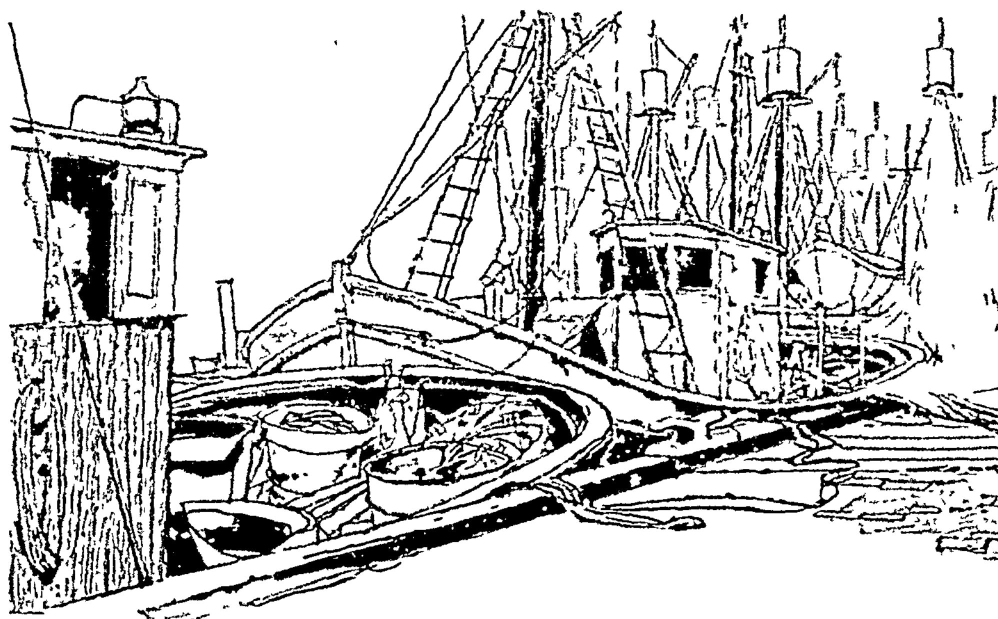
An announcer hurried in. Adam slipped out of the studio and into the ante-room, where he found Ditto, who welcomed him hastily and then fell into silence; clearly, he did not want to run the risk of missing a word. The announcer made his brief introduction; Skeffington was on. He stood easily at the microphone, his hands in his pockets.

"Good morning, ladies," he said. "I know how busy you are this morning with your household chores, but I thought you might like to hear just a few words on the progress of the current political campaign. Some people seem surprised that the womenfolk have such concern over political affairs." He picked up the clipping. "I notice that a young opponent of mine only yesterday expressed astonishment over the large number of women at the last meeting of the Women's Democratic League. I was a little shocked that any man *could* be astonished by the fact that our wives and mothers care so much about the civic problems that affect them and their families. A man who's astonished at that probably thinks that a woman's place is standing barefooted and subservient in a basement, breaking her back over a wash-tub. Now, I don't say that my young opponent, if he believes this, is at all malicious about it. I think it's rather that, being so young, he hasn't had a great deal of opportunity to see for himself the magnificent things that women have been doing in the world of public affairs. Matter of fact, I think he probably relies a good bit on what his older advisers tell him. I'd like to remind you in this connection that two of his most prominent advisers were years ago the leading opponents of woman suffrage. . . ."

Skeffington developed this theme. Finally, he recited from Wordsworth:

"A perfect woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command."

As the fifteen-minute period was nearing its close, he cast one eye at the clock, and finished precisely on time. He nodded to Adam, and they walked out of the studio together with Ditto close behind.



"I think the ladies must have enjoyed your reference to the 'perfect woman, nobly planned,'" Adam said.

"I always like to use a little poetry in talking to the ladies," Skeffington said, "although sometimes there's the temptation to use the wrong kind. There's a charming verse by Tom Moore:

Ask a woman's advice, and, whate'er she advise,
Do the very reverse and you're sure to be wise.

Now that more or less sums up my own sentiments," Skeffington said, getting into the car, "but I'm a little doubtful about its value as a vote-getter. Well, now we're off to the water-front."

As the car started, Ditto said, "I was wondering, Governor: when we get down to the docks will you be giving a speech to Camaratta's longshoremen?"

"Among others," Skeffington said. "First I want to stop at Fleet Pier and say a few words to the fishermen."

"A very loyal group, the fishermen," Ditto said approvingly. "Many's the night I stopped by Fleet Pier on the way home in the old days and got myself a nice piece of swordfish or a bit of haddock. Jumbo Jim Kilcullen would hand me the fish right off the boat. 'Here, Ditto,' he'd



say, 'take this home to the missus with my compliments.' A grand man, Jumbo Jim. A heart as big as the State House. You remember Jumbo Jim, Governor?"

"I remember him well," Skeffington said. "He double-crossed me three times in a single year."

"Oh, you're right there, Governor!" Ditto said quickly. "You couldn't *trust* Jumbo Jim. What I meant was, he was a great hand with the free-for-nothing fish, but you wouldn't trust him with a ten-cent dime!"

When they reached Fleet Pier the car turned in through the gates and moved down to the edge of the pier. Along both sides were strung the vessels of the fishing-fleet. They were small and dingy, the men who came from them, one or two at a time, seemed suspicious and resentful.

Skeffington walked alone on to the pier, making towards a squat, dark man who sat on a pile near one of the boats. The two men shook hands; fishermen from the other boats began to gather round slowly. Skeffington moved among them, shaking hands, exchanging greetings. Finally someone placed a small box next to him, and he stood on it and began to talk more generally as the men converged upon him in a grave, attentive circle. Adam heard little of what was being said, but occasionally he caught an isolated phrase: ". . . the rising menace of cut-throat

Canadian competition . . . ." ". . . experienced man to protect your interests . . . ." Twice he heard laudatory references to Portugal. Skeffington talked for perhaps ten minutes; at no time was he interrupted by cheers, applause or laughter. He finished abruptly; rather to Adam's surprise, the silent men now burst into applause; they clambered about Skeffington, shaking his hand.

Skeffington came back to the car. "Take her round to the Morgan docks," he said to the chauffeur. To Adam he said, "A good few minutes' work. Could you hear anything at all?"

"Very little. But did I hear you mention Portugal?"

"A man can't run for mayor on the domestic issues alone. Not in this day and age. We all have to cultivate the wider vision."

"You mean that in a local election you talk about, say, Russia?"

"No. That's one of the great handicaps for the local politician: you can't talk about Russia and Communism; they've never been much of an issue round here. You have to evolve a foreign policy that meets local requirements."

"Which includes what?" Adam asked. "Portugal?"

"You'd be surprised how important Portugal becomes," Skeffington said, "when you're speaking to the Portuguese fishermen. Still, it isn't a major point. There aren't enough Portuguese. There are only two points that really count."

"Such as . . .?"

Skeffington held up two fingers. "One," he said, ticking the first, "*all Ireland must be free*. Two," he said, ticking the second, "*Trieste belongs to Italy*. At the moment the first counts more than the second, but that's only because the Italians were a little slow in getting to the boats. They're coming along fast now, though; in twenty years the Irish issue will be about as burning as that of Unhappy Ethiopia."

They reached the longshoremen's headquarters, and, led by Skeffington, marched into the large and barren hall. Here, burly men stood about in groups of three and four. Skeffington went directly through the suddenly silent groups of men, nodding to left and right, and stopped before a large, swarthy, smiling man.

"Hello, Camaratta," he said. "Good to see you again."

"Sure," Camaratta winked and laughed loudly. "Everybody likes Camaratta at election time, huh?" He laughed again.

The poor fool, thought Skeffington without compassion; *he'd better laugh before the bomb goes off.* For the method of disposing of Camaratta had been worked out, his successor would now receive a public accolade, and the news of Camaratta's treachery to Nucatolla would be assiduously spread among the longshoremen Skeffington said aloud, "I'm glad you're fond of jokes, Camaratta. And speaking of jokes and laughter, how is Johnny Nucatolla these days? Is he laughing much?"

"Poor Johnny," Camaratta said regretfully. "A real nice fella He wanted to be mayor real bad. But he just couldn't get the dough. Too bad. I hear it broke the kid's heart. Well," he said, looking round the room, "you wanta chew the fat with the boys, huh? Okay, I'll interduce you myself, real pretty."

They walked over to the small platform at the far end of the hall; jumping up on it, Camaratta yelled for attention, and then embarked upon a long, illiterate and—to Skeffington—decidedly unpleasant introduction. He heard the note of insolence in it, the yoking of his name with that of Camaratta, somewhat to the latter's advantage.

At last Skeffington began to talk, confining himself to the usual remarks about backbreaking toil unaccompanied by sufficient safeguards or appropriate reward. It was a speech he had given many times before on the water-front, but he felt that even the slightest change in the anticipated pattern would arouse only suspicion in the slow bosoms of these hulking men. As a group, he did not hold the stevedores in high regard. "Pin-heads and trouble-makers," he once growled to John Gorman "The only difference between them and a bunch of orang-utans is that orang-utans don't spend all their time out on strike."

As he talked, Skeffington's eye scanned the audience. He was looking for someone and at last he found him. The man was standing by himself in front of the large notice-board, his huge hands folded across his belt buckle. He was a tall, big-boned Scot with a watchful face; his name was Macpherson. He was a person of consequence among the stevedores and, after some weeks of careful preliminary investigation, Weinberg had reported that here was the instrument for the destruction of Camaratta.

Finishing his speech, Skeffington was applauded. He left the platform with Camaratta glued to his side, and walked quickly to the back of the hall. It was one of those extraordinary moments when he was grateful for the presence of Ditto Boland. He introduced Camaratta to Adam,

then said easily, "Ditto Boland you know. As a matter of fact, Camaratta, it's a happy coincidence that we're all here together today. I want to discuss something with you, and Ditto can be of some help. I've been thinking that perhaps the city should pay some sort of tribute to these longshoremen of yours. Possibly an annual ceremony, honouring those hardy men who have died in the performance of their duties."

Camaratta nodded languidly. "Great," he said. "And about time. There's men died like rats down in them holds. Like rats."

"Exactly. It's high time the city recognized these dedicated men officially We might annually honour an anonymous longshoreman, pay our respects to the Unknown Stevedore. Now we have a little ceremony we perform each year in memory of the heroic Pilsudski: a wreath is cast upon the waters, and so forth. I thought something similar might be done for the longshoremen. And as Ditto is our authority on the Pilsudski ceremony, I think I'll get him to tell you the details. Maybe you'll have some suggestions for improvements Meanwhile," he said, backing away slightly, "I can make my farewells to your men."

Camaratta's eyes narrowed. "Hey," he said moving forward a step. Then he hesitated, halted both by the eager Ditto and by his own cupidity From the words of this fat man could come profit; he shrugged and said, "Okay. . . . What's the pitch?"

"What the Governor and I do every spring for the memory of that grand Polish hero Pilsudski is a lovely thing. It warms the cockles of the soul, as we say," Ditto began enthusiastically. Skeffington moved off, pleasantly aware that the swarthy deceiver, caught in the web of Ditto's intricate narrative style, would be held fast for some time to come.

He greeted the stevedores singly and in small groups, pausing to say a few words to each, to drop a hint here and there. As planned, Macpherson was standing alone.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Macpherson," Skeffington said to him. "I understand you have some interesting ideas about the water-front. I wonder if you'd care to discuss them?"

Macpherson looked at him with colourless grey eyes, set in a harsh face. "Aye," he said.

"Good," Skeffington said crisply. "Tomorrow night at ten, at my home. Until then, Mr. Macpherson."

He continued his rounds, satisfied.

Weinberg had been right: Macpherson was his man. Soon the longshoremen would know that Camaratta was no longer useful to them.

Adam had made very little out of all this, but he had disliked Camaratta on sight. In the car, leaving the pier, he said to his uncle, "Who is he, anyway?"

"Camaratta? One of Nature's noblemen," Skeffington said. "Ask Ditto. Did he listen with interest to the tale of Pilsudski?"

"He was all ears and eyes, as we say, Governor," Ditto said promptly. "He even wanted to know what happened to the beautiful wreath. I told him it got water-logged and sunk to the bottom like a heavy stone, as we say. And he had a great idea as per this respect, Governor. He said why didn't we use a rubber wreath or a plastic one? You could fish it out and use it over again."

"The ideal memorial to the Unknown Stevedore," Skeffington said. "Camaratta must be among the most sentimental of men."

"A very nice man," Ditto said. "He's happy as a song-bird about our ceremony, Governor. He can hardly hold his horses till we throw the wreath out. Oh, that'll be the day for him!"

Skeffington agreed. "Yes, that'll be the day." He turned to Adam and said, "This has been a pretty heavy schedule for you; you deserve a bit of respite. I have to go back to the Hall to straighten out a few details. Do you suppose you could occupy yourself for a couple of hours without inconvenience?"

"Yes, easily " The return to City Hall, he knew, was for the meeting with Gorman and Weinberg. He said, "Actually, it fits in very well. I have a few things to do at the paper."

"Fine. I'll drop you there. You come to the Hall at about four thirty or quarter to five, and we'll get moving again."

In a few moments, the car pulled up in front of the newspaper building.

Skeffington said, "My compliments to the management. You might tell them I've just noticed that their side door opens contrary to the fire laws I wouldn't be surprised if they had a little trouble with the building inspectors shortly." With a cheery wave he was gone, the long car speeding towards City Hall.

Adam went to his office. He had been working only a few minutes when the door opened and the managing editor came in. He was thinner

these days; his eyes had acquired a habit of blinking with great rapidity. As he entered the office, he turned to glance nervously over his shoulder; it was as though the old, irascible, merciless voice which trailed him so constantly down the corridors had become a visible thing. He stood behind Adam, looking at the latest Little Simp drawings. After a moment he said, "Where's the chipmunk?"

The companionable rodent was no longer perched on Little Simp's shoulder. "He's in the hospital," Adam said "I've put him there until his fur grows back." A villain employed in a neighbourhood supermarket had sold Little Simp a carton of poisoned breakfast food. The next morning at the breakfast table, wise Daddy, scenting danger, had sprung from his master's shoulder and devoured several of the lethal flakes, collapsing in agony. Fortunately the poison had acted merely as a painful depilatory, and Daddy, alive but hairless, had been sent to hospital.

The managing editor looked at Little Simp glumly. He asked, "How's your uncle?"

"Very well, thanks, Ralph. I have a message from him to you." He repeated what Skeffington had said about the side door. "He mentioned some potential trouble with the building inspectors. Is that a possibility?"

"How the hell do I know? Don't I have troubles enough as it is?" He thought of the defective side door; he thought of Skeffington; he thought of expense; he thought, inevitably, of Amos Force, even now waiting for him in his office. With a little moan he disappeared through the doorway.

When Adam arrived at City Hall a couple of hours later the conference was over; together uncle and nephew once more took to the campaign trail.

Here, in these hours of late afternoon and evening, Adam saw his uncle shift gears: perceptibly, the pace quickened, the routine became more complex, the burden heavier. Between the hours of five and midnight they passed, almost without pause, through a swift, bewildering succession of widely scattered appearances, speeches and presentations There had been an open-air meeting in the West End. Across the city, they had gone indoors; over the tea-cups, to an exclusively feminine audience, Skeffington had talked quietly of home, poetry, and the necessity of the experienced hand in guiding the body politic They had visited

a hospital. They had gone to two dinners: both huge affairs at which Skeffington was the principal speaker. Later they had gone to a television studio where Skeffington had talked for a quarter of an hour. Then there had been the houses of old friends, thrown open for Skeffington's purposes; here, over buffet spreads, he had welcomed those of the neighbourhood who had come trooping in, telling anecdote after anecdote, mostly about politics and politicians familiar to them all

In the car now, riding home, Adam said to Skeffington, "I don't see how you stand it. I'm exhausted, but you look as though you were good for hours more."

Skeffington regarded him with amusement. "I have to," he said simply. "In politics, only a young man can afford to look tired. A man well along in years has to demonstrate that he's still in the prime of life. It's very important. I remember that when Arthur Powell first ran for the Senate he had his picture taken chopping wood. He won, and that became his trade-mark; every election thereafter he had to swing the axe The last time he ran he was close to eighty, and he hadn't lifted anything heavier than a soup spoon for five years, but he didn't dare give up the demonstration. They taped the axe in his hands, and held up his arms with guy-wires while a friendly photographer snapped the picture. He won, too. And just a couple of years ago, one of our respected elders who wanted to be President went out to the Convention in Chicago, jumped off the train at the station and raced the reporters on foot to his hotel two miles away. He was out to prove something. He had to. And," he said, "so do I."

The car drove on, and Adam reflected upon still another aspect of the day He had observed that no two of Skeffington's expeditions corresponded exactly; each was aimed at a special group. The electorate was not only divided by race, religion, national background, sex, capital and labour; inside each category it seemed that there were special cells, each of whose concerns appeared to be in direct opposition to those of every other cell. Adam was staggered by the multiplicity of minority interests. He mentioned this to Skeffington, and added, "As near as I can work it out, what you really have to do is be all things to all people."

"Not a bit of it," Skeffington said imperturbably. "I only want to be one thing to them. I want to be their mayor. This involves a little juggling here and there, but it's mostly a matter of practice, and of knowing

what each group really wants. There's a considerable difference between what they *say* they want, and what they'll settle for. You can promise them the first, but you only have to deliver the second That brings us to man's best friend—the compromise. I'll give you a small illustration. You remember this afternoon we were in Ward Five? It's an Italian district all the way through. You may remember that I spoke about a statue soon to be erected on the plaza."

"Yes. A statue of Columbus."

"His name was mentioned," Skeffington said dryly. "This afternoon's audience consisted exclusively of members of the Knights of Columbus But there are certain practical objections to putting up a statue of Columbus. First of all, the city is already loaded with statues of Columbus; he's vulgarly known as the Pigeons' Friend. Secondly, there's a good deal of opposition to it within the ward. The Sons of Italy have been shouting for a statue to Charlie di Mascolo, who was their head man round here for years. A small band of lunatics wants a statue to Roosevelt. A substantial group, headed by the venerable Monsignor Tancredi, is rather partial to a statue of Monsignor Tancredi. As the plaza's city property, it's pretty much up to me to decide. That's where the compromise comes in; I'll announce it immediately after the election."

"And what is the compromise?" Adam asked, curious.

Skeffington chuckled. "Mother Cabrini," he said. "Italian born, and the first American saint. Let's see them get out of that. The first man, woman, child or monsignor who objects will be stoned out of town. That's what I mean by compromise.

"Well," he said, as the car stopped, "here we are. It's been a long day; did you enjoy it?"

"Very much, Uncle Frank," Adam said truthfully.

"I hoped you might; I'm glad. I'll give you a ring as soon as something else breaks. Good night, my boy."

"Good night, Uncle Frank."

The car pulled off and Adam went up the front path, thinking of his uncle.

Mother Cabrini! The compromise was cynical, reprehensible; nevertheless, Adam found himself laughing He thought again that his uncle was a most extraordinary man.

CHAPTER 8

It was the final week of the campaign and Skeffington now pulled out all the stops Every hour was given to the urgent business of returning himself to office. He had every expectation of doing just that. With a cold, experienced eye, he had assessed his position and found it good. As he had predicted, the campaign had been expensive: in the past fortnight the big money had begun to pour into the McCluskey campaign Skeffington had expected this; it did not worry him. His organization had worked smoothly, the opposition had been able to spring no disquieting surprises, and he himself had been at the top of his form.

And so, in this final week of the campaign, satisfied and confident, Skeffington acted characteristically. He stepped up the schedule of his personal appearances; his newspaper ads became larger, more frequent; his name, face, and the words AN EXPERIENCED LEADER blossomed on huge new hoardings; he doubled the city-wide distribution of posters, leaflets and handbills; he purchased more radio and television time. It was his customary home-stretch drive for victory.

In this week McCluskey too picked up the pace, chiefly by increasing the number of his television appearances. He liked television, and—more significant—so did his principal supporters. These improbable allies, who had met in mutual detestation to down the common foe, were political veterans who had been to the wars before; they had few illusions about their candidate. He had been selected, quite simply, because he was the best available combination of the necessary if negative virtues; and as they came to know him better they came more and more to feel that their hope of success lay in preserving a decent distance between him and the public. The solution was television.

For this television campaign, experts had been consulted; the results were programmes which originated in the living-room of McCluskey's home. Here, night after night and day after day, the candidate was revealed to the voters: a tall, plumply handsome, well-turned-out young man, with large earnest eyes and a boyish smile. The series was called "At Home with Kevin McCluskey." Usually the candidate sat on a long divan, facing the camera; at his side sat an associate who was to interview him; round the divan were the appurtenances of Home: the

bookcases, the comfortable easy chair, the large Irish setter stretched out sleepily in front of the fire-place (this docile beast had been hired for the duration of the campaign; the authentic McCluskey dog had proved to be a snappish, untelegenic cur).

And so, night and day, McCluskey and the associate by his side played the television game of question and answer

ASSOCIATE: Well, Mr. McCluskey, how do you feel now that you're nearing the end of the campaign?

MCCLUSKEY *(resonantly)*. I feel fine, Dick. I honestly believe it's been a great campaign, for myself, and for the hundreds of good, unselfish people who've worked with me. I think we've managed to get through a few home truths that badly needed telling to the people of the city.

ASSOCIATE: Is it too early to ask for a prediction on the outcome?

MCCLUSKEY. No, Dick, it's not too early. I'll be perfectly honest with you. I honestly believe that we're going to win by a substantial majority. You see, Dick, I think that if we've done nothing else in this campaign we've at least revealed to everybody for the first time the terrible extent to which this fine city has been riddled by graft and corruption and mismanagement I honestly believe, Dick, that now that the people have seen for themselves the frightening record, there'll be a public revolt against the man who is chiefly responsible for it.

ASSOCIATE: There's some talk, Mr. McCluskey, to the effect that if you do win next Tuesday, it will be largely as a result of the "protest" vote. Would you care to comment on that?

MCCLUSKEY: Yes, Dick, indeed I would. We do anticipate a large protest vote. But I'd like to add that I don't think the people of this city will vote merely *against* something. I think they'll vote *for* something—for an administration that will *get things done*. In other words, I'm interested in seeing that the people get exactly what my opponent never even bothers to mention in his speeches—such things as better low-cost housing, a decent minimum wage, a reasonable tax rate, better pay for our splendid schoolteachers, better pay for our policemen and firemen, who risk their lives daily for us. That's why I'm sure, Dick, that on Tuesday next the voters will turn against this old and decadent régime, and send a young, fresh, honest administration into City Hall!

ASSOCIATE: Well, if one can judge by talking to the men whose job it is to evaluate the trends, that's the way things undoubtedly seem to be

pointing. *(A change of pace)* By the way, Mr. McCluskey, I suspect that a good many of the women watching us tonight would like to know how Mrs. McCluskey is bearing up under the strain. Would you say that the life of a candidate's wife is a happy one?

McCluskey: Ha ha ha. Well, Dick, it's certainly a busy one. As to how happy it is, perhaps you'd better ask her about that I think I heard her coming downstairs just a moment ago. *(He turns on the divan and calls out in a mellow voice)* Dear! *(Mrs. McCluskey enters from the right, bearing a tray on which are a glass of milk and some small cakes)* Ah, here you are! Dear, you know Dick Bulger, of course. He has a question to ask you.

Mrs McCluskey *(acknowledging Bulger by smiling at the camera)*: Yes, of course. Mr. Bulger and I are old friends by now. But before I answer any questions, Mr. Bulger, I have to remind my husband that a candidate is supposed to eat as well as work! *(She places the milk and cakes on the coffee table before McCluskey, smiling at him in gentle reproof)* He hasn't eaten a thing since breakfast, he's been so busy!

Associate *(laughing)*. I can appreciate how you must feel about that. But how does it feel to be the wife of a candidate for mayor?

Mrs McCluskey *(glowingly)* It feels absolutely wonderful, Mr. Bulger! Of course I've never been so busy in my life, with the children to take care of, and the phone ringing day and night, and Kevin working so hard, but it's been a perfectly thrilling experience for me, Mr. Bulger!

Associate: I'm sure all the women watching us tonight can understand that. By the way, speaking of your children, I imagine they're getting quite a kick out of all the excitement?

McCluskey *(whose milk and cakes are as yet untasted)*. Of course, the children present a bit of a problem at a time like this, Dick Both Margaret and myself have quite a job making sure that they don't get too much excitement. Of course, Kevin Jr. is away at school—he's at Saint Ignatius's, a fine school run by the Jesuit Fathers—but the others—Tom, the twins and little Valerie—are here with us, and we try to see to it that the campaign doesn't interfere with their schedules.

Mrs. McCluskey: As a matter of fact, dear, they came downstairs with me just now. They said they wanted to see you go on television. I was just putting Valerie to bed, but nothing would do but that she come too!

Associate *(eagerly)*: As long as they're down here, could we please get them to come over before the camera? Just for a moment? I know the television audience would love to see them.

McCluskey *(exchanging humorous glances with his wife)*: Well, dear, it seems as if we'll have to produce the stars of the family. *(Turns and calls)* Come over here, children, and say hello to Mr. Bulger. *(Four children come trooping dutifully to the divan and arrange themselves promptly about their parents. Only Little Valerie is without self-consciousness. She toddles over to her father and, hauling herself up on to her father's knee, seems to get stuck midway. Her little dress shoots up at the back, and the camera is focused for a long moment on the cunning sight of the little backside, encased in rubber pants. It is a touching and comic sight, everyone breaks into laughter. . . .)*

"Oh Lord but that's good!" Festus Garvey cried in admiration. Seated in front of a television set in a vacant shop which served as a temporary political headquarters, he had been watching with interest this latest performance of his candidate. "The cute little baby bottom shootin' right up into the camera so's every woman in the audience feels she can reach right out and give it a lovin' pat! That little behind is worth a thousand votes! He's a good lad, that McCluskey! A grand family man from the word Go!"

"Don't kid me," said Camaratta. He had come in unbidden, to see Garvey. "Don't kid me," he said again. "This McCluskey kid couldn't work out no sharp gimmick like that."

"Who cares who worked it out?" Garvey cried. "The point is, 'twas done, slick as a whistle, by the lad himself."

It was a time of satisfaction for Festus Garvey; he felt that now, for the first time for years, there was truly a chance of defeating Skeffington. He was satisfied by the progress of the campaign, by the coalition of which he was a part, by the funds it had collected, by the fact that none of its members, with whom he worked day after day, appeared to suspect his duplicitous intentions towards them all the minute the election was over. But most of all, he was satisfied by his candidate's remarkable, unlooked-for plasticity.

In the beginning, Garvey had had some fears that McCluskey might refuse to respond to the suggestions of older, wiser and more flexible men who understood the ways of indirection. (Garvey himself, for

example, had often used a little trick on his political broadcasts. He would stop in the midst of a sentence and drop his pen-knife or a few coins on the floor, just to make a little clatter that the radio audience could hear. Then he would say, "Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen of the radio audience. I beg your pardon for breakin' off so sudden in our little chat together, but my rosary beads slipped out of my fingers and I had to stop and pick them up. I know you'll understand my feelin's!" Oh, it was a grand trick and one that had worked like a charm.)

McCluskey, fortunately, had responded to advice. It was true that sometimes he balked, and sometimes he even got up on his high horse, but, thought Garvey comfortably, he comes round nice as Nelly in the end. You just had to talk to him a bit, show him that 'twas all the same thing he'd wanted to do, but a little different way of doing it, that was all. "Oh, a grand lad!" Festus chortled. "We'll kick the stuffin's out o' that big baboon with the air-conditioned Amos 'n' Andy voice! Oh, I'll teach him to lock out o' City Hall the man who put in the Phil J. Rooney Memorial Macadam Parkway!"

"Yeah," Camaratta said approvingly. "Sure. That's the stuff. Kill him." He spoke with swelling emotion, for it was only that morning he had learned of his deposition and ruin. There had been a secret convocation of the longshoremen with Macpherson, he had heard about it too late. Rushing there in a rage, he had been met by a united front, and from the suddenly commanding Macpherson he had learned of Skeffington's coup. He said now, savagely, "I'll give it to him good. I'll chop him down and carve him up. I'll cut his heart out with a meat axe." He went on to describe his further proposals for retribution.

Garvey heard him with annoyance. Quite suddenly he became aware that the man who was sitting in this room with him and to whom, indeed, he had been talking in almost congenial terms, was, after all, Camaratta. With considerably less sociability he growled, "Just what d'ye want, Camaratta?"

"Look," Camaratta said. "I come here on business. I'm gonna ditch Skeffington You wanna make a deal for your kid, okay. You do me some good, I do you some good. What about it?"

"For the love o' God!" Garvey cried irritably. "You do *who* some good?" He felt fine now. His ill nature completely restored, he was in the midst of a disagreeable situation in which he held all the cards. "A

man like you has nerve, Camaratta! Comin' in here with nothin' in your pockets but the dirty paws you were born with, and sayin' you feel like doin' me some good!"

"Listen, Garvey, don't kid around with Camaratta. You wanna win an election. Okay I got votes And I can deliver."

"You got nothin'," Garvey said contemptuously. "Nothin' at all. Skeffington fixed you good, Camaratta! I hate the sight o' the murderin' scoundrel, but he done a grand thing there. I only wisht I done it myself! So get along with you, back to your little outhouse or wherever it is that you'll be hangin' your hat now. Good-bye and good riddance to you!"

The broad olive face before him had been darkening with each word. Camaratta stood still, his hands opening and closing by his sides. Then the words rushed out in a thick stream of primitive abuse. He made as if to rush towards Garvey, but the latter leaped spryly from his chair and hustled over to a jumble of objects piled in a corner of the room. He turned, then, to face his adversary, a gnarled, red-faced, fearless little old man, jumping up and down, a poker in his hands.

"Come along here now, Camaratta!" he howled. "Come along, my fine big bully-boy! Two steps closer and ye'll get this poker smash in your fat mush! Come on now! Where's my big brave Camaratta without all his fine big lads from the water-front? Why don't the big bully-boy step up here all by his lonesome?"

Camaratta looked at him for a long time; then, suddenly, spat on the floor, turned abruptly and walked out, slamming the door viciously as he left. For a few seconds Garvey continued to brandish his weapon. Finally he stopped The poker slipped from his fingers, and he came slowly back to his chair and slumped into it, gasping. He was exhausted but exultant. Oh, but didn't that take the biscuit? Wasn't it a grand thing? A little bit of a tangle every now and again: that was the thing to keep a man lively! He was happy. the near encounter had taken him back to the campaigns of the good old days.

Some distance away, Norman Cass Sr. and Amos Force had been watching the television programme of their candidate together. At McCluskey's mention of low-cost housing, Amos Force shook his head angrily, when the heightened minimum wage was suggested, he came down hard on the table with the flat of his hand.

Norman Cass's eyes were on Mrs. McCluskey. She was smiling at the audience. Cass was not attracted by the over-eager young woman, who never failed to mention his cousin Althea, with whom, apparently, she had once served on a civic committee. Yet she had her value: this socially ambitious woman would respond to occasional invitations to the Country Club or to a few decorous musicals. He would see Althea and prevail upon her to renew this frail alliance of long ago.

"Stop worrying, Amos," he said when the speech was over. "McCluskey is saying what we agreed he must say. After the election—well, he's amenable to the proper handling."

"Then you think he's a complete fool?"

"Of course I do," said Norman Cass. "And so do you."

IN THE Cardinal's study, the Cardinal himself was watching the television screen. The young Monsignor had seen his distaste grow by the minute. When, finally, little Valerie was displayed, there was a loud grunt of exasperation, and one large, still-powerful hand motioned violently towards the television set. The Monsignor turned it off.

"The hope of the future!" the Cardinal said bitterly. "A mealy-mouthed, manœuvrable piece of dough!" He threw a fretful glance at his secretary.

The Monsignor smiled slightly. "I must say that McCluskey seems a fairly feeble proposition."

"Dreadful," the Cardinal sighed. "Simply dreadful." He closed his eyes as if in pain. "This cheapness, this vulgarity! It's obvious by now that he's no more than a pawn."

The Monsignor became daring. "But still better than Skeffington?"

The Cardinal shifted about in his chair swiftly, the beginning of anger in the old, faded eyes; then, as he looked at his secretary's face, anger slowly disappeared, and he gave a short, mocking laugh. "Yes, still better than Skeffington."

The Monsignor became consoling. "There is this," he said "As you say, he's manœuvrable. There are other people behind him besides Garvey, Cass and Force; and pretty decent people at that. If he should get in, don't you think it's just possible he might respond to a push in the right direction?"

The old man groaned "These silver linings!" he said. "No, I don't.

I'm hardly in a position to disavow the possibility of miracles, but I can't believe in the likelihood of one here. There is only one thing to be said for McCluskey. He is awful, but he is so inept that he couldn't possibly drive us to further disaster as swiftly and certainly as an expert marauder like Skeffington could." He rose, and moved slowly and with some arthritic difficulty towards the door of the study. "Good night, Michael," he said.

"Good night, *Eminenza.*"

JACK and Nancy Mangan, too, were watching the progress of Kevin McCluskey on television. When the programme was over, Nancy yawned and said, "You know what, sweetie? I like Adam's dear old crooked uncle much *much* better than that man of yours."

"So do I," Jack said promptly. "But like him or not, it's Little Sir Chump for me, all the way to the mayor's chair. Or so we hope."

"*You* hope," she said. "Not me. I'm all for that nice corrupt old man who hasn't got a fat happy little wife to bring him milk and little cakes on television."

"And bear him children," Jack said. "Don't forget the kids. They're very important, sport. Especially Flying Valerie."

Nancy said lazily, "And what does your organization president, the professor, say to all this? He's always talking to me about ethics. He's always talking about *everything,* really, but mostly about ethics. Ethics in politics. Didn't he write a book about it?"

"Sure," Jack said. "But he approves of the campaign. You see, he isn't much concerned about *our* ethics; it's the other side that worries him That's because they're reactionaries. What we do, even if it may not look quite above-board at times, is really all right, because we're on the side of the angels. Even better: we're on the side of the professor."

"But McCluskey! Sweetie, he's such a *cluck!*"

"Agreed," Jack said. "One of the cluckiest. But you see our predicament; we good-government people have nowhere else to go."

"I'd a *thousand* times rather take Skeffington."

"Derisive laughter all round," Jack said. "You don't take Skeffington; he takes you. So it's the cluck for us. You never can tell: maybe we can do something with him."

Nancy lit a cigarette "Jack? No fooling. Who *is* going to win?"

He hesitated, then said, "Probably Skeffington. He can be knocked off, but probably not just yet. It'll be close, sport, but I'm afraid your darling evil old man may take it by a nose."

At a busy corner in the heart of the city, Charlie Hennessey parked his sound truck and climbed to the small platform fixed to the top. In his campaign he had been scrupulously fair; he had vigorously, and equally, attacked both Skeffington and McCluskey. Tonight it was McCluskey's turn.

"Well, dear folks," he began, his powerful platform voice reinforced by the public-address system, "I only hope you had the good luck to be tuned in on young McCluskey on the television tonight. Marvellous! It's a modern miracle, dear folks! If it wasn't for television there wouldn't be a one of us who'd see him at all, for the simple reason that his keepers don't let him out! A great big boy who finally got through college and the university, who had three fine years of shore duty in the Navy, and they don't let him come out on the public platform and talk directly to you people as I'm doing here tonight! There's a lack of confidence there, dear folks! But now we're given the good, safe, long-distance peep at what goes on round the McCluskey house when Dad's at home! Oh, dear folks, it's heart-warming! Grand to see a man who's running for the highest office in the city sitting nice and easy in his own living-room, answering nice little questions put to him by his pet parrot, and a grand big hired dog in front of the fire-place! It all goes to show you how times have changed, dear folks! Back in the old days, when a man wanted to make a speech he hired a dinner-jacket! Now he's got a dinner-jacket but he has to hire a dog!"

A short distance away, on a side street within hearing of the sound truck, the long official car of the mayor had halted. Inside, Skeffington sat listening to Charlie Hennessey with obvious amusement; after a few minutes he said to Adam, "I must say Charlie's in great form. I wonder how he found out about the hired dog? I intended to have a little fun with that one myself."

Adam asked, "Did he actually hire that big setter?"

"That big *Irish* setter Yes, indeed, he did hire it. I'm surprised they didn't hire an additional child while they were at it."

"Little Valerie seemed adequate to the occasion," Adam said.

"Little Valerie's useful," Skeffington agreed, "but a girl is under a handicap: you can't call her Franklin D. Think what they could have done with a bright-eyed boy, procured by the week from some friendly orphanage. Little Franklin Delano McCluskey."

They drove off. Over the past few weeks Skeffington had been deeply pleased by his nephew. Adam had been observant but unobtrusive; he had followed along with alert, intelligent interest. But Skeffington was aware that this close association must have created a domestic problem for his nephew. "By the way," he said casually, "I haven't asked you about your good wife for some time. I don't suppose she looks with much favour upon these evenings?"

Adam said loyally, "You know, she's really never raised any objection to my doing this, Uncle Frank."

"Then she's a remarkably considerate young woman. Generous as she is, however, I don't imagine she'll be exactly unhappy when the campaign is over."

"Well, no," Adam admitted. "I don't imagine she will."

"I tell you what," Skeffington said thoughtfully after a moment, "I think I might like to come calling for a few minutes. On you. Do you think that might be arranged?"

The request was completely unexpected, and Adam hesitated just an instant before he said: "Of course. Please do, Uncle Frank."

"I hadn't realized until now that it's been such a long day," Skeffington said. "Do you suppose I could impose upon you for a glass of milk and a snack before we go on to this final rally?"

"No imposition at all," Adam said automatically. He thought with sinking heart of Maeve.

They drove to Adam's house and let themselves in the front door. Adam heard light footsteps coming across the kitchen; a moment later Maeve appeared in the hall. She saw Skeffington and halted abruptly; her face flushed and she said, simply, "Oh!"

Adam said hastily, "You remember Uncle Frank, dear."

"Yes," she said. There was a small pause before she added, "It's nice to see you again."

"And it's very nice to see you, my dear," Skeffington said, walking forward and taking her hand. His manner was courtly. Maeve stood

still, smiling uncertainly. She looked quickly at Adam; in the clear, lovely eyes he saw both hurt and accusation, and he hastened to explain.

"We're hungry men," he said. "We need something to tide us over until after the rally tonight. Is the ice-box up to it?"

It was an appeal to Maeve's good manners and hospitable instincts. She nodded and said, "Yes, of course We have loads of things. Let me go out and see what might be good; I won't be a minute." She began to edge towards the kitchen, but Skeffington continued to hold her hand gently but firmly.

"Why, I couldn't think of rushing you like this," he said genially. "In addition to which, I glanced through the door of your living-room just now, and saw something I'd like to examine. Could we delay our meal a few minutes while you show it to me?" He had begun to walk towards the living-room even before he had finished talking; Maeve necessarily walked with him It was a manœuvre accomplished with such ease that they were out of the hall before Maeve realized with sudden indignation that she was actually being steered into her own living-room by the intruder. But Skeffington choked all indignation off by pointing to a large photograph on the piano.

"Your father and mother," he said, stating a fact. "That's what I thought it was. Your father and I are old acquaintances, my dear. I hesitate to use the word 'friends,' for I don't suppose your father and I agree on much of anything. Yet I don't mind admitting to you that I have a very healthy respect for him all the same. He's a courageous antagonist and a man of singular achievement; I can think of very few men who can boast of an equivalent career." He passed on to a more congenial subject. "And your mother," he said, looking once more at the photograph. "I don't suppose you can remember her at all, can you?"

"No, not really. She died very soon after I was born."

"I know. I knew your mother quite well." He pointed to the piano and said, "Do you play, by the way?"

The tangential question caught her by surprise: was she to be asked to perform? She said hastily, "Not very well, I'm afraid."

"I'll bet you do play well," Skeffington said. "Your mother did. She was a fine pianist, even as a little girl. Matter of fact, I once gave her a medal for it. It was when she was a schoolgirl in the old Saint Xavier's on Grover Street. There was a musical competition for all the school

children of the city; as mayor, I presided and distributed the awards. Your mother won a silver medal." He chuckled. "A shy, nervous little girl with great big eyes; I remember they gave her a push to get her out on the stage; she made her curtsy, announced that she was going to play a piece by Mozart, then ran to the piano and played like mad. When she finished everybody clapped and so did I. To tell you the truth, my dear, quite a few people felt like applauding your mother all along the way. She was a remarkable and a lovable woman."

Maeve listened, absorbed, as he eulogized the mother she had not known. Adam had an inspiration. "If you two will excuse me for a minute," he said, "I'll run upstairs and clean up a bit."

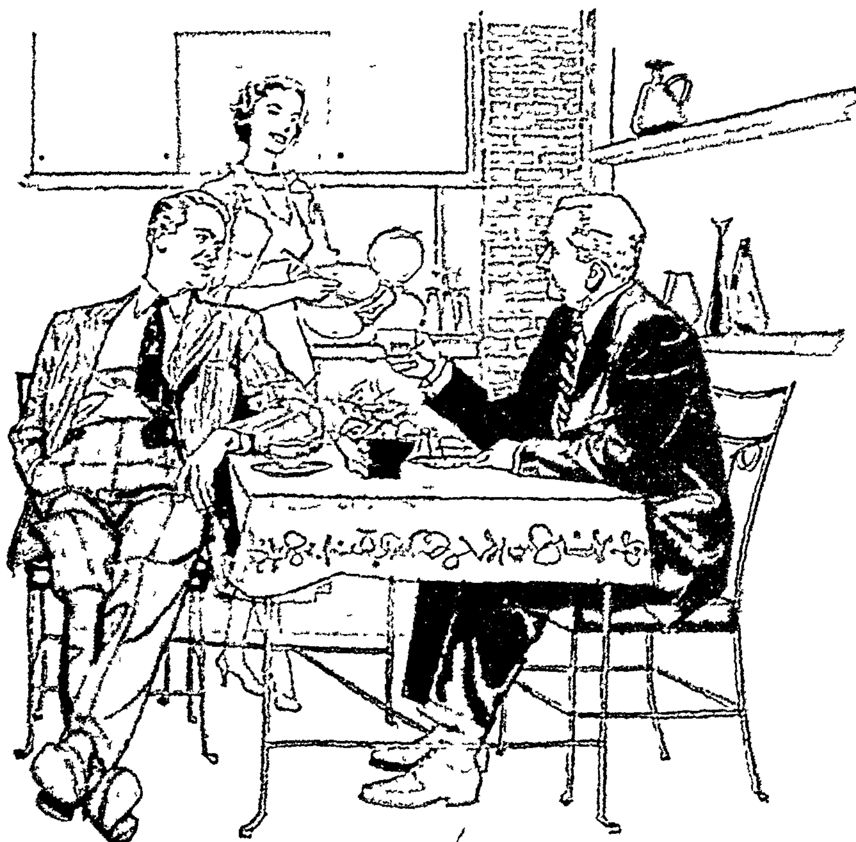
Before he reached the bend in the stairs he heard the gratifying sound of the deep, rhythmic voice, picking up where it had left off. He remained upstairs for some minutes. Then, quietly, he came down and looked into the living-room. He could see his uncle, talking easily, while Maeve leaned forward in her chair. As Adam watched, her lips parted in a little smile at something that had just been said. Adam relaxed. He felt a good deal easier.

Skeffington saw him and lifted a hand. "Spick and span, you return," he said. "Come in and join us as we explore the family tree. I'm giving your wife the benefit—or the curse—of a talkative old man's reminiscences."

Maeve said excitedly, "Adam, it was wonderful! Your uncle knew everybody in Mother's family: Grandmother, Grandfather, even my great-grandmother!" She caught her husband's eye upon her and suddenly felt herself reddening absurdly again. It was all most confusing; she rose hurriedly to her feet. "Anyway," she said resolutely, "if you're going to have anything at all to eat, I'd better go out and get it now."

Once again she was attempting retreat; once again she was balked, for Skeffington rose, too. "We'll go along with you," he said. This expert tactician, having secured an advantage, had no intention of abandoning it. He fell into step beside her. "We can't have you working away out there while we sit in here talking. Besides, I'm always at home in the kitchen. When I was a little boy, I thought the kitchen was the happiest room in the house. It was always warm and full of good smells."

They went into the kitchen together. There, in the bright, spotless room, Skeffington and Adam sat facing each other at the kitchen table



and, while Maeve busied herself about cupboards, tins, pans and stove, Skeffington continued to talk of people of a bygone age. They were stories curiously lacking in the sardonic, irreverent current which flashed through the usual Skeffington narration; warm and affectionate stories, ideally recounted in the rich and softly rolling tones. Adam looked at his wife and saw their success. Maeve was captivated by the elderly raconteur. When, some time later, the two men prepared to leave the house, Skeffington said to Maeve: "Good-bye, my dear. And thank you very much. Not just for that extremely agreeable supper, but for the pleasure of talking with you."

"I enjoyed it too," Maeve said. "I'm so glad you came." She held out her hand to him and said shyly, "Will you come again?"

He nodded. "I will indeed. We haven't seen nearly enough of each other, my dear. If I may, I will remedy that in the future."

It was a promise which strangely pleased her.

As she cleared away the dishes, she was thoughtful. What had long been feared had now come to pass, and, in the light of the consequences, the fears seemed to have been baseless and even a little absurd. The ogre who had walked so dreadfully through her imagination had come to call in person; she had found him to be a charming and completely engrossing old man. While she did not now, because of one short hour, jettison her father's warnings, she did feel, once again, the faint and unfamiliar throb of doubt.

In the car, Adam said simply, "Thanks, Uncle Frank."

"I always enjoy being thanked," Skeffington said, "but in this case, for what?"

"Just for the visit. It may have worked wonders."

"I'll admit I did what I could to offset certain impressions given her by her lovable Dad. I thought it might ease the situation a little. And I'll let you in on a secret: a session like that benefits me more than anyone else. I don't find it a hardship to talk about the old days. It's a way of life that's virtually disappeared; most of the people are gone, and I'm not getting any nearer the cradle myself. So it's not too unpleasant to reminisce a bit, especially when the audience is young, and interested, and, in a certain sense, connected to me. I find that counts."

They rode on. Adam had found this short speech of his uncle's unexpectedly moving. In the past several weeks Adam had observed his uncle closely. There had been moments when a word, a phrase, had flashed through the old man's conversation and swiftly disappeared, leaving behind it the hint of loneliness. Adam knew something of the history of Francis Jr He regarded it as a measure of his uncle's pride and disappointment that in their time together he had not once mentioned his son Perhaps a conversation over a kitchen table, in the home of young people who were, in a sense, his own, was not without its value to him. For the first time, Adam, looking at this calm, masterful figure who sat beside him, sensed in him something curiously pathetic.

It was a fleeting impression, for they had arrived at the auditorium. It was jammed with a noisy, enthusiastic crowd, and Skeffington immediately made his way to the platform. He began to talk; and even the suspicion of pathos was impossible:

". . . I understand my opponent's supporters refer to him as 'a young man of promise,'" he said. "How right they are! I've never heard so many promises from one man in my life. So far, he's promised to eliminate graft and corruption, reduce the tax rate, lower the cost of municipal transportation, settle the city's traffic problem, give firemen and policemen more money, enlarge municipal housing projects and put a new wing on the Public Library. Why, it's enough to frighten a man like myself! But then, I console myself with the thought that we really haven't any assurance that he actually will *do* any of these things. . . ."

It was the kind of talk in which he took particular pleasure; it would both place a seal upon the long campaign and usher him gracefully into victory.

CHAPTER 9

It was Election Night. . . .

Adam had neither seen nor heard from his uncle all day. That morning, he had gone to the polls with Maeve; he strongly suspected that they had voted differently. The recent rapprochement between his uncle and his wife had not, he thought, been so effective as to nullify the old parental pull entirely.

After voting, he had gone to the paper to get in some badly needed work. When evening came at last, he ate an early dinner in a small restaurant near the paper, and then set off with a sense of excitement towards his uncle's campaign headquarters.

He was early; but already, although the polls would not close for another hour, Skeffington supporters and hangers-on had begun to gather. Desks and chairs had been pushed back A pair of huge blackboards stood against the wall; stretched in a row before them were long tables on which rested telephones, long sheets of heavily ruled paper, innumerable black crayons. Ditto saw Adam and waddled ponderously towards him.

"Well, Adam," he said "Well well well well. The night of nights, as we say. A grand occasion for one and all." He stopped suddenly and pointed to a small cubicle at the end of the room which Skeffington sometimes used for private talks. He said, in some alarm, "The Governor's not amongst us yet, I hope, Adam?"

"I don't think so, Ditto."

The smile reappeared. "That's all to the goods, as we say. The Governor always likes me to be here a little before him. So's I can keep tabs on people. The Governor's a great man for having the people he really trusts keep tabs, Adam. Yes yes. It's the men that keep tabs who the Governor really trusts, and not certain high-and-mighty confidential secretaries. I mention no names Do you get my meaning, Adam?"

"I get your meaning, Ditto," Adam said. "What about today, Ditto? You must have been a busy man with all your duties."

"Yes yes, Adam, very busy. I and some of the boys were riding round town the whole a m. and the p m., as we say. Getting out the vote from one and all. Sick old ladies, shut-ins, crippled-up people with no cars; we took them down to the polls, as per the Governor's wishes. The Governor likes everybody to be a first-class A Number One American when it comes to voting. Even the blind and the halted, as we say."

While Adam had been talking to Ditto, the crowd had continued to grow. Men in shirt sleeves had now slid into position behind the long tables; arranging papers and crayons, they were preparing for tabulation. The telephones had begun to ring. Ditto, sighting old pals among new arrivals, drifted away. In a few minutes, the atmosphere had changed, the noise increased. Whatever Adam would see here tonight, it was now beginning.

Skeffington arrived. With Weinberg by his side he came into the room. An exuberant cry went up. Skeffington waved in acknowledgment, and waited for silence before he began to speak.

"Good to see you all here tonight," he said. "I want to thank you for your support at the polls today. I know some of you couldn't give me all the support you'd have liked to, but we're up against a restrictive system. only one vote to a customer this year!"

There were cheers and shouts of laughter; Skeffington continued: "I see that Footsie McEntee is here tonight. Limiting Footsie to a single vote on Election Day is like telling a cannibal chief that from now on he can eat only two missionaries a week. It works a hardship. I sympathize with you, Footsie!"

He bowed to someone in the crowd; Adam saw a small, elderly man with a wizened monkey face being lifted up in the air by his cheering neighbours. Grinning with delight, Footsie joined his hands together

over his head in the traditional gesture of victory. "One vote or twenty," he crowed, "they're all for you, Frank!"

Addressing himself to the crowd once more, Skeffington said, "Footsie used to get from one voting booth to another faster than any man in my experience. Twenty-five years ago he won the repeating championship of the city by voting for me seventeen times in one election. He might have done even better but on the eighteenth try he attempted to pass himself off as a Presbyterian divine whose name he'd come across on a nearby tombstone. Unfortunately, there's something about Footsie that doesn't suggest the ordained Presbyterian, and he was apprehended; but I was always grateful to him for the noble effort. And I'm grateful to him today, as indeed I am to you all We'll all get together after the returns are in and have a real celebration!"

This met a roar of enthusiasm, Skeffington waved again and began to move through the crowd towards his private office at the back The short trip took some time, the benign tangle of good wishes and handshakes was thicker than usual. He saw his nephew and said, "See you in a few minutes."

In his office he was joined by Weinberg and Gorman. The office was not a sumptuous one: three folding chairs, grouped round an old wooden desk. On the desk there was a single telephone.

"Well, gentlemen," Skeffington said, lighting a cigar, "here we are again Let's look into the future a bit" He leaned forward and looked hard at his colleagues. "All right," he said crisply, "let's have it. How are you calling it?"

It was Weinberg who answered first "We're in," he said bluntly. "No landslide, but a good solid plurality. I talked to all the boys, I checked all the figures. It all comes out the same way." He was moved from flat unemotional speech to a rare revelation of his admiration for his superior "You did a terrific job these last two weeks," he said. "I never seen it done better."

Gorman nodded. "You did indeed, Frank. 'Twas a sight to see, and there's no doubt at all it turned the trick The little laddo can send the dog back to the kennel now. He's all done."

Skeffington raised his eyebrows. "Well, well," he said slowly. "All the chickens counted before we've even got the eggs. If I didn't know you were such prudent, experienced men, I might accuse you of wishful

thinking." He leaned back in his chair. "Sam, that good solid plurality you spoke of: let's translate it into less general terms How much?"

Weinberg shrugged again. "Eighty, ninety thousand."

"I see. John?"

Gorman said thoughtfully, "I'd say that'd be about right, Frank. Depending on what happens in the Fifteenth Ward. Festus is still strong up there. Could you sweep half the precincts there, you might well go over a hundred thousand."

Skeffington shook his head. "Too big," he said. "We're going to do well, but not that well. Think what it would mean: it would mean taking nearly three hundred out of three hundred and eighty-five precincts. That's a mighty tall order."

"I wonder is it so impossible, Frank?" Gorman objected. "I mind the time we took more than the three hundred, and not so long ago at that."

"Longer ago than you might think," Skeffington said. "Time slips by us, John. It was actually twenty-five years ago, and under rather special circumstances. For one thing, Roosevelt hadn't as yet come along to do his celebrated impersonation of the Great White Father. For another, I ran practically unopposed: the others were hopelessly split up. It's my guess that we'll go in this time, and handily, but with a plurality of about fifty thousand. Which is quite satisfactory. We mustn't be greedy." He looked at his watch and said, "The returns will start coming in in about fifteen minutes. Let's do a little work before the festivities begin."

The three men slid smoothly into organizational matters. For the next quarter of an hour they were very busy indeed.

In the outer room, Adam was moving about through the jam of people. He soon discovered that the prevailing mood was one of unqualified optimism: that Skeffington might lose was not a possibility these people entertained A playful hand tapped his shoulder. "Dear boy," a voice said, "how *good* to see you!"

"Burbank!" Adam had not seen his former office mate since he had left the paper. Apparently the change had been a happy one Burbank had acquired a new radiance He wore a Kelly-green waistcoat and a dashing Tyrolean hat and held a light cane with an air of negligent elegance. Adam said warmly, "It's good to see you, Burbank. How's the new job? All expectations met?"

"Oh, much more than merely 'met.' Your uncle is among the most generous of living men. And then you must remember that I find this a labour of love. You may have noticed the recent series of broadsides against our Mr. Force?"

Adam remembered a series of attacks on Amos Force which had dripped with venom; he had suspected their authorship at the time. He said, "Yes, I've noticed them, Burbank."

"All my work," said Burbank modestly. "I have done other good things to earn my keep—jabs at Mother Garvey and, of course, at dear Candidate McCluskey himself—but none, I think, had quite the *feeling* of the Force series. That is really why I am here tonight. You see before you Burbank the Tiger, thirsting for the kill!"

Then he, too, was convinced of victory; it was unanimous.

Burbank glanced at his watch. "And now," he said, "at any moment your uncle should emerge. The polls have closed; the returns will be coming in Listen to those telephones ring!"

Adam said, "How long will it be, do you think, before anything definite is known?"

"Now that," Burbank said, "is the poser. If there should be a landslide, we should know in less than an hour. For a nice, neat, substantial victory, the kind we may expect for your uncle this evening, it should be somewhere between two and three hours Ah!" he said, breaking off. "Here is your uncle now."

Skeffington, with Gorman and Weinberg, had come out of the private office, and was walking towards the long tables, the blackboard and the telephones. As he advanced, two men seated behind a table rose, turned to the blackboard and began to chalk in the first reported figures. It was at this moment that Adam, for the first time, became aware of the tension: despite the general optimism, the atmosphere of the room had changed. All noise had subsided; the shuffling, aimless crowd movements had ceased

Then, just as Skeffington reached the tables, one of the men pulled his chalk carelessly across the blackboard; there was a piercing squeal The whole room winced, Skeffington turned to the offender and said casually, "You're disturbing the class, Danny. I guess you'll have to stay after school and clap erasers"

It was a mild enough pleasantry, but it did the job. There was a loud

laugh; the tautness disappeared. The mumble of conversation picked up once more; if it was not as insistent as before, this was perhaps because now everyone, Skeffington included, gave the major part of his attention to the all-important blackboard

Adam watched the board at first with interest, then with some concern. He realized that any such early tabulation was surely inconclusive. Still, it had produced two developments which he found disconcerting. The first was that McCluskey, not Skeffington, had jumped into an early lead. The second was that this lead was increasing rather rapidly. Adam eyed the mounting score: with more than two thousand votes reported, his uncle was behind five to one. Had this early sweep been anticipated? Skeffington's face was as imperturbable as ever; with a slight smile he said something to those near him; there was a burst of laughter. Clearly, this was not a sound born of alarm.

Burbank provided the explanation. "Ward Seven votes lead all the rest," he said "The Silk Stocking ward—always solidly against your uncle, always the first to report. But in just a few minutes more, the returns will be coming in from the unruly, unwashed wards—and then the pendulum will swing, never to return."

In the next few moments what Adam saw was indeed encouraging: the columns of figures began to shift slightly. The Ward Seven vote was now slowing down; the first edges of the swell from John Gorman's big ward were creeping in. Skeffington noted the development immediately; others in the room, hardy veterans at these election nights, saw it almost as soon The room became livelier, more boisterous. The swing was on. what was happening was recognized by everyone

What happened next was not recognized by everyone Characteristically, it was Skeffington himself who caught the first sign The Ward Seven tabulation had stopped; the vote from Gorman's ward continued to yield its comforting harvest; one by one, the other wards had begun to declare themselves. Skeffington examined the chalked markings swiftly with a sharp, professional eye. He had hardly begun the examination when he stopped short. It was a small return from a single precinct, so small as to be almost negligible—yet it had stopped him The precinct had never been a doubtful one, he had always carried it comfortably. And he was carrying it now, although—and this was what had brought him up so sharply—the margin of comfort was lacking. In this small,

reliable precinct, the race was proving to be surprisingly close: he was barely squeezing by. His eye ran down the length of the board, taking in each new figure; it was a swift but complete survey to determine whether the fluctuation was part of a pattern or a freak.

He turned from the board and glanced casually round the room; the look told him that what he had seen had not been seen by others. There was universal cheer, spirits ran high. But he knew that the minor politicians, workers, office seekers who surrounded him were loyal but apprehensive. Their total dependence upon favours from above had not left them with any great courage He knew what would happen if, suddenly, through the room there should drift the first faint scent of possible defeat

He looked at Gorman and Weinberg, he saw that they were looking at him; they too had noted the flaw. He gave a short, barely observable nod, and turned back to the board; the two men moved slowly and unobtrusively to his side

"Sam," he said in a low voice, "go inside and phone Teddy, Charlie Ferrino and Mike Gallaher. Find out what's going on."

Weinberg went off, wordlessly In the same low voice Skeffington said to Gorman, "What's your guess?"

"I don't know, Frank I don't like it much," Gorman said candidly. "I'm not a great man for the little surprises." His old blue eyes passed up and down the board thoughtfully; he said in his mild voice, "It could be just the one precinct. Still, I don't like the soft look of those two spots in Three and Thirteen."

Skeffington nodded "Nor I And they seem to be getting softer. That doesn't necessarily mean much The one in Three is a wobbler anyway; the other's in Patsy Tiernan's territory and it wouldn't be the first time Patsy's fallen down. Nevertheless, I agree it could be trouble; we won't know until Sam——"

But he was interrupted. "Well well well, Governor," said a voice. Skeffington looked into the beaming, tiny moon of Ditto's face. He controlled his exasperation, it was important that Ditto, above all, should be unaware of concern in high places· the fat man's capacity for dissolving into a boneless and peculiarly communicable alarm was all too well known to him.

"Why, Ditto," he said pleasantly, "the evening's now official. I always

look upon your appearance as a symbol of good luck on these election nights."

The fat man radiated his happiness. "I do my very best, Governor," he said "Yes yes yes. I and the boys want to give you all the happy felicitations on this night of nights, Governor. I and the boys are over there by the door there, and I'll go back there on the double time and get them so they can come over and tell you how they feel in their own identical words, as we say "

"Ditto," said Skeffington, "I'll tell you what you do. I want you to go back to the door, stay there and keep the boys with you. I have an important job for all of you. I want you to keep your eyes peeled for the radio and television people, to clear the way for them when they get here. You'll be in charge. Is that clear?"

"Oh yes yes, Governor. I'll take the matter into my own two personal hands, Governor, and I——"

"Good," Skeffington said. "You'd better get along now and get started. It's a big job, and an important one "

Ditto hurried away.

Skeffington looked towards the door of the private office. Even as he looked the door opened· Weinberg emerged and came towards him "Well, Sam?" he said quietly

"I dunno," Weinberg said. "Something's up, and it ain't good. I don't understand it yet, but I tell you this: I think we got trouble."

"All right," Skeffington said impatiently. "We've got trouble. Where? What kind of trouble?"

In swift, blunt terms, Weinberg told his story, it was not a comforting one.

He had talked with the three men and discovered that they had been on the point of calling Skeffington—always a bad sign. There was both confusion and concern in some of the ward headquarters. They were some minutes ahead of the main Skeffington headquarters in receiving their own returns and, as the results came off the machines, it was apparent that McCluskey was piling up respectable totals in a number of areas considered inviolable, in several marginal precincts he was actually leading. What it all meant the next half-hour would tell. At the moment, this much could surely be said . there had been disquieting break-throughs all along the line.

"I tell you what," Weinberg said, concluding, "I think maybe you oughta talk to them yourself."

"I intend to," Skeffington said grimly "At once."

With Weinberg and Gorman close behind, he walked rapidly to the office. He knew that the ever-watchful eyes of those about him, observing the haste of his passage, would darken with alarm; wondering would begin, whispers would rise He did not care In the last few moments the preservation of morale had become a matter of secondary concern; what was required immediately was a definition of his own position. In the office, he snatched up the telephone and made half a dozen calls to key points

After the sixth call he put down the phone and said, "All right. Now at least we've got some sort of general picture. It's not a pretty one. We've got trouble: the boy's begun to pull in about thirty precincts, and widely scattered ones at that. In a couple of them he's started to snowball. Now, if those are all, it's not so bad. Gallaher thinks they are all; he thinks the boy's about played out."

Gorman said thoughtfully, "It could well hinge on how the East End holds. You've heard nothing from Cavanaugh?"

Skeffington shook his head "No. It's too soon." The East End was the single section where the voting machine had not been introduced; tabulation would be slow. "We should be safe enough over there, but nothing's running according to the book."

He spoke calmly, and this was a tribute to the firmness with which he held himself, for, when he had received the news over the telephone, he had been stunned, hit especially hard because he had been completely unprepared for the blow. Too shrewd and experienced to be guilty of over-confidence, he had come to his headquarters tonight secure in the knowledge that no stray sign of danger was to be seen. How, *how* had it started? It was a question to which he had no answer at all. He said steadily, "Very well. We may be all right. If the East End holds, we surely will." He got to his feet "Sam, you'd better wait in here. I want someone by that phone every minute. I want every bit of information you get the second you get it. Meanwhile," he said, "I'll wait outside, with the faint of heart. I imagine they're already preparing to throw dirt on my lowered coffin. I'd better impress upon them the fact that we're not quite ready for the funeral yet "

Skeffington and Gorman left the office; in the outer room, the figures on the blackboard had now caught up with those received by Skeffington over the phone and they had had the anticipated effect. Skeffington pushed quickly through a subdued and murmuring throng, speaking briefly, jocularly; it was virtually a chain of brisk, heartening comments all the way to the blackboard. Reaching it, he turned and, addressing the crowd, said: "Gentlemen, it begins to look as though we could have used Footsie to advantage today!"

Again, it was the shock tactic, the unexpected admission; there was some laughter, and he said: "However, I've just done a little checking round the city, and I find that our blackboard reports are a bit misleading; I think in a very short time you'll see an improvement in the over-all picture."

The atmosphere lightened as he went on. These men of easy vacillation were eager for the note of hope, and once it had been sounded they responded readily. Something of the former clamour arose; they pressed closer to the blackboard.

The wait—for Skeffington, at least—was all too mercilessly brief. Before a quarter of an hour had passed, he knew that he was beaten. As the new figures were chalked in upon the board, he once again read their meaning clearly, in advance of all others in the crowded room. And while the clamour rose on new-found hope, while Footsie demonstrated unfaded agility to all who would attend, while Ditto, with pompous zeal, arranged and rearranged the reception committee for the television crew, Skeffington stood erect, impassive and perfectly still: the unique possessor of the knowledge that he was a defeated man.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Gorman stir suddenly, and he knew that his old associate had read the signs, too. He heard the office door open; he sensed, rather than saw, the swift approach of Weinberg, bringing with him the news that, at best, was utterly useless. For the East End, which just a few minutes before was of such vast significance, now no longer mattered at all With or without it, Skeffington was beaten. The signs he had read did not point merely to defeat; they pointed to cataclysm. Of all the wards in the city, only John Gorman's held firm in the Skeffington camp.

It was the thing of which he had not even dreamed: it was the McCluskey landslide.

It was unthinkable, unimaginable, and yet—it was happening. He closed his eyes When he opened them, he turned to look at Weinberg and Gorman; now, as earlier that evening, their glances met. The exact dimensions of the disaster to come were of no importance; each man thought now only of the terrible, unforeseeable fact of the disaster itself, and how it could conceivably have come to be.

It was a mystery to Weinberg, but he saw it primarily as a matter of betrayal. There had been, obviously, sell-outs all along the line: people who had been trusted had been bought by flattery, promises of money, of political advantage. Throughout his long association with Skeffington, Weinberg had moved with a tough, sceptical spirit among men whose loyalty he continually suspected because it was not as fierce and hard as his own. For his loyalty to Skeffington was not an impersonal one. Skeffington was not merely his boss; Skeffington was his friend. And the conviction that he had failed to uncover this treachery now left Weinberg crushed in miserable self-reproach.

The defeat was a mystery, too, to Gorman. Saddened, he saw it not as a betrayal but as an organizational breakdown. Somehow, the leaders had not held their wards in hand Discipline, the very heart of the successful political machine, had been allowed to go to pot. Gorman was overcome by a rare, deep melancholy. He had seen Skeffington bound back from defeat before, but now he was forced to a sad truth: Skeffington was no longer young. Could a man in his seventies come driving back hard from the most devastating defeat of his entire career? Gorman hoped so, but he was a realist.

Most of all, the defeat was a mystery to Skeffington himself. Less limited than his colleagues, he could not ascribe the catastrophe to the simple, single cause What had beaten him was not betrayal or organizational failure but something altogether new What it might be, he simply did not know

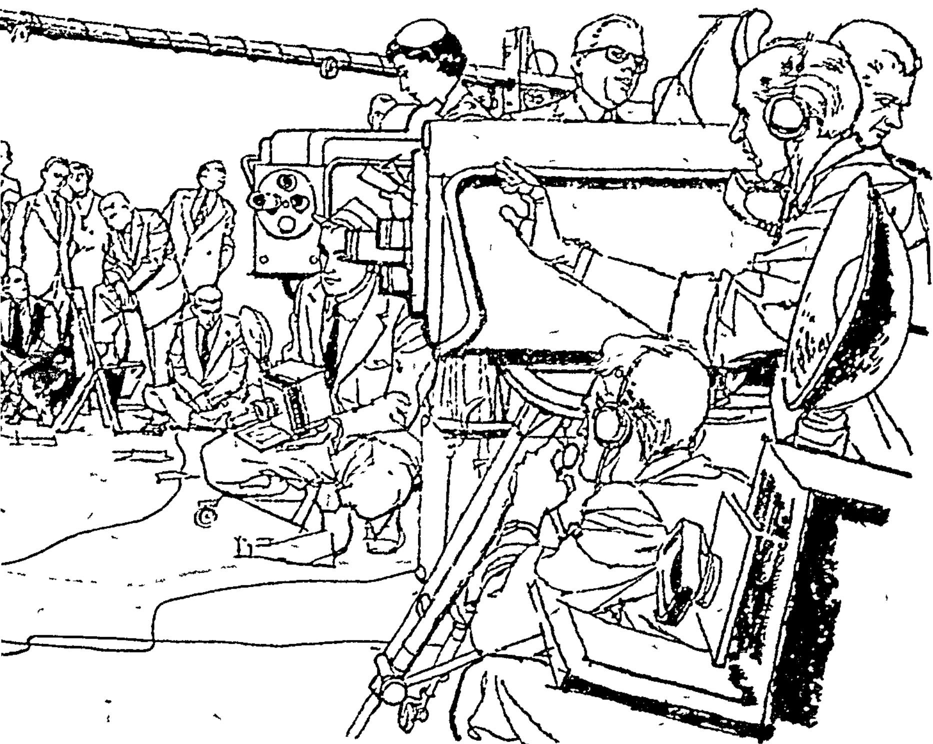
He tried desperately to think it through, but his mind had been dulled by the disaster. He stood staring straight ahead at the board, instinct and habit warning him to be still, to make no gesture yet In a few minutes he would have to acknowledge the fact of his own defeat, meanwhile, in his mind he turned over and over and over again the aching, unanswerable question. *Why?*



By now realization had burst on the room like an explosion: Skeffington was beaten. One moment he was standing above them, proud leader of their hopes; the next, he had been blasted from the skies. They began to look quickly and with a hurried sympathy at the big man who stood like a statue before the blackboard, then, hastily, they came back to themselves and the frantic consideration of what mattered most: how would the defeat affect *them?* For they had their lives to lead, they had their wives, their children, themselves: this was really the heart of the matter.

As they explored it, they had a frightening vision of a future filled with pain, uncushioned toil, economy; a future bereft of sinecure, privilege, protection; a future, in short, without City Hall.

The fretful sounds of defeat rose higher round the room; then, curiously, they gradually subsided, to be replaced by an odd silence. The McCluskey figures had continued to come crashing in, and for the first



time those in the room realized the size of the defeat. It was a silence of awe.

Suddenly it was broken. Someone had brought a portable radio to headquarters, another man, in turning, accidentally struck a control with his elbow, and the set turned on to its full volume A strident voice roared through the room: *". . . long reign ended in a stunning upset! In the greatest election surprise in many a year, the career of Frank Skeffington, long the undisputed boss of the city, may at last be over! HE——"*

The radio was jammed off; men glared at its owner, then stole a glance at Skeffington. He was still standing motionless before the blackboard; he gave no sign of having heard.

Adam, farther back in the room, turned to Burbank, seeking contradiction.

"Is it true, Burbank?" he asked. "What does it mean?"

"All too true," Burbank said bitterly. "And the meaning is clear enough: just one more kick at poor old Burbank!"

Adam stared at him, but before he could say anything there was a commotion at the door. A group of television men were attempting entrance; Ditto, near hysteria, was preventing them, protecting his chief from the cameras which would expose him in his defeat.

It was Skeffington who restored order: his numbness was beginning to wear away. He knew what he had to do, and decided to do it quickly. He called sharply, "Ditto!" The fat man looked round; with one flip of the hand Skeffington signalled him away from the door, and then motioned the men to come in.

The television crew entered, reinforced by additional newspapermen who had been rushed over by the papers; it was a story that demanded extraordinary coverage.

Skeffington walked to the centre of the room. He was introduced briefly; and when the cameras were ready, he was on the air. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said. "Just a word about today's election. It appears that Mr. McCluskey has won, and that he will be your next mayor. I congratulate Mr. McCluskey, and I wish him luck. He doesn't need the congratulations; he may need the luck. I know some of his friends and advisers. To each and every one of you who were kind enough to cast your vote for me today, I can only say: Thank you, and God bless you all."

He stepped back; the camera light went off. Flash bulbs popped as the photographers went to work in earnest; the reporters began to shoot their questions. Skeffington put up a hand and waited for silence before he spoke.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I have no further comment at this time. I'll be at your service tomorrow morning at eleven in my office. Good night, gentlemen."

One reporter, more intrepid than the rest, cried, "Just one question, Governor. Have you made any plans for the future?"

Skeffington looked at him. "Yes," he said, "I have." A familiar gleam came into his eye; something irrepressible was sparking up through the gloom. "I'm going to run for governor of the state. Tomorrow morning I'll officially announce my candidacy. And now, good night, gentlemen."

It was a bold statement, delivered boldly while he was still on his back; he thought grimly that it would startle them. It did, they thronged round him, pressing for additional comment. He would say nothing; slowly, he moved towards the door. He saw Ditto before him; he reached over and patted him on the shoulder. "Thanks, Ditto," he said. "I appreciate everything. I'll see you around." He saw the clumsy, loyal face light up with gratitude, and he moved on.

At the door he stopped, and turned to say a final word to those in the room.

"To all of you who were here with me tonight, thank you," he said "I'm sorry you had a disappointment, we'll try to make it up the next time. Good night; I'll see you tomorrow."

He was getting into his car when he heard the rush of footsteps and, turning, he saw his nephew struggling through the crowd. With all that had happened, he had completely forgotten about the boy; he was glad that he was here now.

Smiling slightly, he said, "Hello. Sorry we couldn't produce a better show for you."

"Uncle Frank," Adam said abruptly, "would you like to come over to our house for a little while before you go home? There'd be no one there but Maeve and myself and I know she'd love to have you." He added urgently, "Come along, Uncle Frank."

Skeffington smiled again; he put a hand on his nephew's arm "Thanks, my boy," he said, "but I don't think I'll take advantage of your kind offer. I'm a little tired, and I want to get home Will you drop in tomorrow?"

"Yes. If you want me to."

"I do," Skeffington said. "Good night, my boy."

"Good night, Uncle Frank."

The car slid quietly away.

Adam, deeply moved, thought that he had never before seen anyone quite so lonely. He remembered that he had not even told his uncle, in so many words, how sorry he was. He hoped his uncle knew; he rather thought that he did.

SKEFFINGTON's car drove quickly through the city Gradually, his despair was giving way to anger He was a proud man: when he had

stood so apparently unaware before the blackboard, he had caught the glances of pity; he knew what the room was thinking. The awareness that he had, even for that moment, been a pitiable object, that he had been considered as someone *finished,* stirred him to a growing fury. For he was not only proud, he was extraordinarily tough. Over fifty years ago, he had come, as little more than a boy, into an endless battle against the hardest, wiliest politicians his arena had produced. He had fought them all, he had beaten them all, he had broken them all. And now the thought that, because he had been defeated by a young simpleton, he was regarded as incapable of smashing back and destroying this imbecile boy spurred fury on.

When the chauffeur let him out at his house he went up the front path, puffing slightly, and let himself in. He dumped his hat and coat on the hall table, and decided to go directly upstairs. Anger had subsided somewhat, but he felt better, stronger for it He would make his plans tomorrow, after a night's sleep; still gripped by some of the driving force of emotion, he began to mount the stairs rapidly.

He had gone half-way when he felt the first pain. It was in his chest; it was quick and sharp. He paused abruptly; the pain weakened. He picked up his feet again, cautiously now; and then, all at once, the pain came back, cutting in savage knife strokes across his chest, his left shoulder and down the length of his arm. It was agonizing; he felt that he could not breathe; he reached out for the support of the banister—and pitched forward on his face, senseless.

CHAPTER 10

SKEFFINGTON was ill, seriously so. Adam, notified the following morning, hurried to his uncle's house; there the doctor gave him the full and disquieting report. Francis Jr. had come home early, he had discovered his father, he had gone into a panic; nevertheless, he had retained enough command of himself to telephone the doctor, who had rushed over and, with the uncertain assistance of the son, had placed the still-unconscious Skeffington in his own bed. A nurse had been installed; Skeffington had regained consciousness and characteristically taken command of his own case, refusing to go to a hospital or to have an oxygen tent Now, under medication, he was sleeping.

"It was his heart, then?" Adam said

"Yes A coronary, and a bad one." The doctor lit a cigarette and stared out of the drawing-room window. "It's not his first, you know. Or did you know?"

Adam shook his head. "No. He never spoke about it; I had no idea that anything at all was wrong."

"Very few people did. Naturally," the doctor said, "your uncle wasn't eager to publicize the fact But he had an attack just about three years ago. He's been watching himself pretty carefully ever since—up until this campaign, that is. I know what he's been doing lately, a month ago I told him to stop it." He shrugged, and said, "In the middle of a campaign, your uncle is not too open to conviction " The doctor looked curiously at Adam. "I wonder if you could arrange to be over here every day for a couple of hours in the morning, and a couple more in the afternoon?"

"Yes, certainly. Of course "

"Good. I think it would be advisable. Your uncle is an important man, and he's tremendously popular; people will want to get at him. They all have to be kept out Everybody. Including," he said firmly, "all those hangers-on who claim to be 'old pals.' Keep them all out, will you?"

Adam nodded. He said, "I'd like very much to see him myself, if I could Is that permissible?"

"When he wakes up, drop in for a minute. He asked for you this morning, as a matter of fact " An old friend of Skeffington's, the doctor had guessed something of Skeffington's regard for Adam "Your uncle asked about Francis Jr., too, and of course it's all right for him to go in But I'd appreciate it if you could tactfully suggest to him that he might keep a stiff upper lip while he's in there. Can you do that, or would you rather I did?"

"No," Adam said, "I'll do it."

"Good," said the doctor, making ready to go. "If I'm needed at any time, the nurse will know where to get in touch with me I'll be in again this afternoon."

"Doctor," Adam said, "what do you think? I know he's a very sick man, but . . . will he pull through all right?"

The doctor hesitated. "He's not in good shape now but, if all goes

well, he could come through quite nicely. I'd just as soon not be too optimistic. Anything could happen. On the other hand, if we can keep him quiet and undisturbed he may do it."

Adam, left alone with his new responsibilities, went first to see his uncle. Skeffington was awake; the nurse beckoned Adam into the room. Skeffington heard him approach and turned his head slowly "Hello," he said. "Good to see you."

"It's good to see you, Uncle Frank. It'll be better to see you when you get out of there."

"Won't be too long. Don't pay any attention to what that elderly medico tells you He's a professional alarmist." His eyes closed; they opened again and he said, "How's your wife?"

"Fine, thanks, Uncle Frank."

"Good," he said drowsily. "That's good." His eyes closed again, his lips parted; he was asleep.

Adam left the room quietly, not greatly encouraged by what he had seen He went downstairs to meet Gorman and Weinberg, who had arrived while he had been talking with his uncle. Both practical men, they had already talked to the doctor, and knew how they could best be of help.

"We'll keep the boys away," Weinberg said. "I've already passed the word round. Jack Fitzgerald will have a cop on duty, day and night, at the front door."

"Thanks a lot, Sam," Adam said "I wish you could go in and see him, but the doctor's being pretty firm against all visitors"

"We can wait," Weinberg said.

Gorman nodded, and the two men rose to go Adam said, "I'll tell him you were here."

"He'll know," Gorman said simply. "Frank would know that. But you can tell him all the same, and thank you."

ADAM, once more alone, went upstairs to talk to his cousin. To pump courage and good sense into this light-headed man who had last night gone into collapse would not, he thought, be easy.

But he received a surprise. Francis Jr. was in his room, and the extent to which he had already recovered left Adam flabbergasted. For there on the smooth green carpeting of the bedroom were half a dozen golf

balls; standing over them, bending professionally forward, a golf club in his hands, was Junior. He was practising his putting.

"Oh, hi!" he said, as Adam came in. The greeting was pleased and entirely free of embarrassment. "What do you say, Adam?"

"Hello, Junior." Looking round at the golf balls on the floor, he said with some bitterness, "Keeping up with your game?"

"No, just something to do," Francis Jr said, putting down the club. "I didn't want to go out, even for a walk, because of Dad. Golly, that was awful, wasn't it, Adam?"

"Pretty bad. You seem to be holding up very well, though."

"Maybe *now*. But you should have seen me last night. I guess I made the whole show a lot worse by nearly going to pieces," he said, with great candour. "You know how it is: you never expect anything like that. At least I don't. Not with Dad."

Adam said, "But after all, he'd had an attack three years ago, the doctor tells me."

Francis Jr. looked vague. "Well, the doctor's such a Gloomy Gus, always looking on the dark side of everything. And Dad said it wasn't anything much. He went away on a cruise for a couple of weeks, and when he came back he was fine. So naturally I forgot all about it. You can see why I would."

Adam nodded He was discovering what others had discovered before: that it seemed somehow unfair to hold bitterness towards this pleasant, well-intentioned man who, although approaching forty, revealed in every word the ingenuous boy. He talked to his cousin for a few minutes more; Francis Jr., restless in his new confinement, resumed his exercise as he talked. He got down on one knee and sighted along an imaginary line on the carpet Still talking, he got to his feet and began to bring the club head backward and forward in a series of delicate, rhythmic motions. As Adam left the room, Francis Jr. was polishing his putting stroke.

ADAM did not leave his uncle's house until close to dinner-time. The reporters came; the telephone rang steadily; all day delivery vans brought intricate and absurd floral arrangements, bulging beribboned baskets of citrus fruit The donors ranged from a successful local gangster to Mayor-Elect Kevin McCluskey.

That night he told Maeve that his uncle had asked for her.

"Poor man," she said softly. "Should I go to see him? I could help out in some way, like answering the telephone."

He was pleased by the suggestion, but the figure of her father rose in his mind. There would be complications with that truculent little meddler; it was better to avoid friction. He said, "Let's wait and see if Uncle Frank isn't a good deal better."

THE NEXT three days passed quietly. Adam went daily to the paper and Little Simp, and then returned to his uncle's home. Weinberg and Gorman were still invaluable in their assistance. As he had expected, there was no help to be had from Francis Jr. His cousin remained in high spirits: he seemed to find encouragement in the bare fact of his father's consciousness, and each complete sentence uttered by the ailing man was taken as still another harbinger of recovery. Soon, he announced that he thought he might go out for a short walk. After that he went out frequently; the walks grew longer and, although he took care to be in the house at night, he was often missing for hours during the day.

The second day, Jack Mangan dropped into Adam's office.

"Tough break, sport," he said. "A bad one."

Adam nodded. "Bad enough." He told Jack about the ceaseless telephone calls, the flowers, the well-wishers who were being kept away from the house. "What I don't understand is where they were on Election Day," Adam went on. "How could a man as popular as Uncle Frank lose to someone like McCluskey? You're the political expert, Jack have you got an explanation?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, sport," Jack said, "I think I have. In the first place, I suppose a good many people voted against him simply because they wanted a change. It's the kind of thing that helped Churchill get the boot right after the war. Then there was the fact that your uncle faced, for the first time for years, a concerted opposition with plenty of money behind it. That helped, too. But what really did the job, sport, wasn't McCluskey, or Garvey, or Cass, or Force. It was one man. Roosevelt."

Adam stared at him. *"Roosevelt?"*

"Sure. F.D.R. He put the skids under your uncle years ago. It just took until now to catch up with him."

"I don't get *that* at all," Adam said. "Why Roosevelt?"

"Because," Jack said patiently, "he destroyed the old-time boss, by taking away his source of power. All over the country the bosses have been dying for the last twenty years, thanks to Roosevelt. Your uncle lasted this long simply because he was an enormously popular man whose followers were unusually devoted to him." He shot a glance at Adam. "Sure you want to talk about this now?"

"Go ahead, Jack."

Jack shrugged. "Well, the old boss, the local leader, was strong simply because he held all the cards: jobs, favours, cash. What Roosevelt did was to take the hand-outs out of the local hands. Social security, unemployment insurance—that's what shifted the gears, sport. No need now to depend on the boss; the federal government was getting into the act. So the old-timers might still string along with the boss, but what about the kids? Did you ever think about the *age* of the people round your uncle?"

Adam was silent. He remembered the hangers-on at City Hall, the politicians at Knocko's wake, the petitioners he had seen come up to his uncle: there had been no young people among them.

Jack continued. "And remember, the kids are one step farther away from the old country; your uncle doesn't have the old emotional, racial-spokesman appeal for them. If everybody who voted was middle-aged or over, sport, your uncle would have won by ten to one. Well," Jack ended after a pause, "he'll be all right, sport. You wait and see."

As Jack spoke, Skeffington himself was lying awake in his bed. He had no pain; the majority of his conscious moments were spent in a mood of soft, not unpleasant reverie. It was the past, now, that held him. He thought scarcely at all of his recent humiliation, or of future plans. He travelled back through his more than seventy years, and seemed miraculously to come upon only those scenes which had given him happiness. Some of these had been forgotten for years, but now he remembered. . . .

He remembered the small and shabby tenement in which he had been born. He remembered it kindly, because he remembered it under the aspect of love, and of his mother. He saw the small boy, awakening at night, suddenly terrified by reasonless fear, and rushing from his bed

into the embrace of his mother; he felt again the gentle cradling as she rocked back and forth; he heard again the simple verse of lullaby, over and over and over:

Toora loora looral
Toora loora lie,
Toora loora looral—
Frankie, don't you cry. . . .

Memory then slipped swiftly over the hard years of boyhood, and came to the summer night when life began.

It was in the heart of the old Dabney Street district. It was a place of old brick houses which had sadly declined from their genteel beginnings and swarmed with immigrant life; it was a place of a hundred small saloons, each with its steady clientele of family men, who converged upon it every night after dinner for the ritual of a quiet drink and conversation. And here, spick and span in his good Sunday suit, and in his nineteenth year, he stood on a soap-box under the gas-light in front of Johnnie Mahady's Bar and stumped for Big Billy Coughlin; and some of the men passing by had stopped to give a listen to Rosie Skeffington's boy. He had shouted denunciation of Toddy McGahan: ". . . A viper! Yes, worse than a viper! A scorpion, an *asp!* A reptile in human form whose bite of poison has been felt by every man, woman and child in the district!"

It had been his first political speech. Afterwards, a couple of the men had come up and shaken his hand. One had said, "Sure, boy, you got a great bit o' tongue in your head, there!" Later that night he had been complimented by Big Billy himself, and he had walked home at midnight in dreams of glory.

Memory jumped forward. He remembered as though it were yesterday one chill night in autumn when the great torch-light parade had swept out from the centre of the city through the quiet, elegant section where the old inhabitants lived, yelling and screaming and singing for hours, while at the head of the wild procession strode the young man in his middle thirties, his strong face flushed, his hat jammed to one side of his head, his collar ripped almost off, while his name went up in one roar after another. It was his first victory parade: he was THE MAYOR. He was the youngest mayor in the long history of the city; by hard



work, by intelligence, by the force of personality, by a series of bold and imaginative manœuvres, he had seized the organization from his seniors; he had fought hard, bitterly and savagely, and he had won.

And on the following morning he had met several city elders whose sleep he had ruined on the riotous night before, members of the important Fiscal Committee, with whom he would have to work for the next four years.

They came to the meeting in a cold fury, prepared to do battle with the blatant ruffian who had shaken them from their beds. Instead, they were met by an urbane young man, immaculate in morning coat, whose first astonishing remark both unsettled them and set the tone of their relationship in all the years to come.

"Gentlemen, you look weary," he said solicitously. "You ought to get more rest at night."

Then, swiftly, before the gasp had died, he passed into a detailed analysis of the city's problems. It was a brilliant examination of municipal government and, in spite of their hostility, they were impressed He saw in their eyes the growth of wary respect, and then the hope of rapprochement

The hope had soon died; the respect had endured.

He remembered so many things: the night of the Governor's Ball. lavish climax to a campaign that had begun when, defeated as mayor, he had come ripping back in a series of great state-wide sweeps, where speech after speech, for months on end, had brought him, exhausted but triumphant, to the governor's chair; the days of the great, uproarious campaigns against Festus Garvey and his lovely Ma

He remembered the morning in May when, temporarily out of office, and rumoured to be in serious financial trouble with a dangerous lawsuit approaching fast, he had awakened to find the usual line forming outside his front door, but this time much longer than ever before, and this time ready to give, not receive: they had come each with his two dollars or his dollar or his half dollar ". . . to give Frank a lift out of the jam."

And he remembered Kate Since her death, there had not been a day when he had not thought of her, and now, when he was ill and alone, she came back to him more strongly than ever, the one great constant in this pattern of dreams. It seemed to him that he could remember every

minute of every day of the thirty years they had been married. He had loved her deeply; his dependence upon her had been great; and when she died, no one knew, and only John Gorman suspected, what Skeffington had lost.

He remembered it all. the warm, glowing flood of golden moments poured over him as he lay there. In this tour, so mercifully selective, there were no clouds.

Skeffington had been a working politician for more than half a century; in that time he had known betrayal, defeat, unhappiness and despair. More, along his road to glory there were those shabby markers which signalized his own dishonour: for he was not a guiltless man. These he had remembered often; he did not remember them now. Of the people and events of recent years, only one figure emerged strongly and persistently. This was his nephew; of him the old politician thought with fondness, contentment and affection; Adam became a part of the sunlit, lingering day-dream.

So the reverie continued, and it came to an end one night. It was the night of his third day of convalescence. He had been sleeping; he awakened suddenly to find himself breathing hard, and the flicker of a familiar, dreadful pain shooting from his shoulder down his left arm. He lay perfectly still; the pain flashed faintly again, then again, then it went away. He closed his eyes and tried to breathe deeply, after a while he felt somewhat better.

In a few minutes, he opened his eyes; through the darkness he saw the white uniform of the night nurse: she was asleep in her chair. Moving his head slightly, he saw the luminous dial of the clock it was close to three a.m

Skeffington began to think of what had just happened The north window was open just a crack, outside he heard a car. He knew, from the sound, that it was racing down the Boulevard towards the centre of the city. It was the route he himself had taken every morning; and he thought with an unexpected ache of the glistening black Cadillac, speeding through the morning streets, the siren clearing all before it, announcing with its hoarse derisive scream that Skeffington was once more arriving in the city: *his* city, the wonderful, old, sprawling chaos of a city, whose ancient tangled streets and rose-red bricks had held his heart for ever. And it now seemed to him that he wanted nothing more

than that he should somehow rise, dress, go downstairs and out to the waiting car, and once again—just once again—streak through all the city's streets, in one last gleaming, jubilant, splendid morning ride.

But he could not day-dream now; he saw clearly the fact which faced him.

At some time after three o'clock on this clear chill November morning, he knew, sadly and certainly, that he was going to die.

It was shortly after nine when the doctor arrived for his regular morning visit. He exchanged a few words with Skeffington; he glanced quickly at the night nurse, reached into his bag and produced a stethoscope.

He said easily, "I guess we'll do a little listening, Frank. Just to see if you're as well as you look."

"The bedside manner," Skeffington said. He had seen the doctor's glance at the nurse, and he had not been surprised. "The product of that medical charm school you went to."

"Don't talk," commanded the doctor. He listened for some moments with no change of expression. Then, without speaking, he replaced the stethoscope in his bag.

Skeffington broke the silence: "Dan," he said, "I'd like a few words with you In private."

The doctor nodded briefly at the nurse, who left the room. "Well, Frank? I don't want you talking too much, you know."

"This won't take long," Skeffington said. "I got to thinking last night that I haven't been allowed many visitors up to now. I think I'd like to have a few of the boys here this afternoon."

"Not a chance, Frank. Let's not talk any more about it. You just run the city, leave your health to me"

"Short-term employment for both of us," Skeffington said. He gave a little chuckle. "Come on, Dan. Don't kid me. You're not talking to one of your little old ladies now."

The doctor saw the old mocking glint in Skeffington's eyes. He said, "Frank, tell me what happened last night."

"A little spell," Skeffington said. "Nothing much, but I know now what's going to happen." He spoke more urgently. "Dan, I want those boys in here this afternoon. You want to keep me alive a little longer. All right. That's the only way to do it. Because if they're not allowed in,

I'm apt to raise a little hell, and I don't imagine that's too good for anyone in my condition."

"A little moral blackmail: is that the way it is?"

"That's exactly the way it is."

The doctor shrugged. "All right. You win."

He went downstairs and told Adam what had happened. "There's really no reason why they shouldn't come now," he said, shaking his head "It won't make much difference."

Adam said sadly, "How long does he have?"

"I don't know, really A few days at most."

Adam had been prepared for precisely this news for several days; now that it had come, he found that preparation was of no help at all. "What about a priest?" he said.

"Yes. However, you'd better talk to your uncle before you call." The doctor smiled wryly. "He'll know exactly the priest he'll want; it probably will be some old friend."

The doctor left, and Adam, heavy-hearted, called John Gorman, who promised that the company of visitors would arrive about noon. He then went upstairs to Skeffington's room and saw that his uncle was awake. The failure that the doctor had spoken of now seemed to Adam painfully evident. Skeffington, shifting his head, said, "Hello. Good to see you." He patted the edge of his bed and said, "Sit down."

Adam said awkwardly, "Uncle Frank, I was thinking that it might not be a bad idea to have a priest come over."

Skeffington chuckled. "You think it's high time, do you? I agree. I'll tell you what you do. Get in touch with Monsignor Hugh Burke at the Blessed Sacrament Church. He's the one I want." Adam rose, and Skeffington added, "No hurry. I'll tell you when " He was silent for a moment; Adam could hear the heavy breathing. Finally he said, "Did you enjoy it? The campaign, I mean?"

"Yes, Uncle Frank I never enjoyed anything more "

"Good," Skeffington said. "We had some fun, didn't we?"

"We did, Uncle Frank. A great deal of fun."

"I'm glad," Skeffington said simply. His eyes closed, and after a moment Adam left

He called Maeve to tell her what had happened. In a distressed voice she said, "Oh, Adam, I'm so sorry Shall I come over?"

"Come about two o'clock. That will give him a chance to rest after all the politicians have gone. I know he wants to see you."

He hung up and sat by the telephone, thinking of his uncle. In the past months, Skeffington had given him a great deal. What Adam had given in return was something else again: had it been, he wondered, at all adequate to Skeffington's loneliness and need? He recalled what his uncle had said: that they had had fun together. So it was possible that, in these few crowded, swiftly passing weeks, Skeffington too had found something of what he had desired. Adam hoped so.

It was just after noon when the band of visitors arrived, led by Weinberg and Gorman. There were perhaps a dozen of them, and as they filed into his room Skeffington, propped up in a half-sitting position, seemed to have drawn upon some reserve for the occasion. He was fresher, less drawn, and in excellent spirits.

"The gang's all here," he said. "Good of you to come, gentlemen. I apologize for the lack of refreshments, but I'm at the mercy of an old-fashioned physician who opposes gracious living." Skeffington spoke with animation and Adam wondered if they noticed the effort behind the words. "But I'm getting better every day. Only yesterday I was practically a corpse. I looked so poorly you might have taken me for a Republican!"

There was laughter. Ditto said delightedly, "Oh, it's very great stuff to hear you talk like that, Governor! It's grand to hear it with our ears!" In a more aggrieved tone he said: "I and the boys wanted to stop at the flower shop, Governor, but John and Sam said we should come straight over instead. I and the boys wanted to get you a nice bunch of lovely first-class flowers."

"That's the best kind," Skeffington said. "First-class flowers; a grand gift for sick and well alike. But the fact is that so many flowers have been coming in that I understand the downstairs hall has to be licensed as a greenhouse. So it's much better just to see you boys without the flowers. Besides," he said, "I wanted you to come over here for a reason. I want your advice. I meant what I said on Election Night. I'm going to run for governor."

He noted the exchange of doubtful glances. he knew that, to convince them, a little more would be needed. It was not easy; he felt

himself tiring, and his breathing was bad. But he chuckled and said strongly, "Come on, speak up. Who've we got to beat?"

It was an invitation they could not resist, Ditto said fervently, "You'll win with both hands down, Governor! The only one who would stand up against you is old man Potter. And you're just the very man that could beat his two ears off, Governor. Oh yes yes! As easy as floating down a log, as we say!"

The others chimed in while Skeffington listened gravely. Adam saw that this was a game: Skeffington had summoned them here today to play the parts they loved the best; now that it no longer mattered, they had become the counsellors to the king. So they chattered on, and Skeffington, playing his part, listened. And Adam understood what the counsellors did not. that it was a farewell present from Skeffington to them

But it was an exhausting present: Skeffington wondered how much longer he could continue. He looked towards Adam, but before Adam could move, the doctor entered the room. Crisply he declared the visit at an end.

The men left, each coming to the bed to shake Skeffington's hand. When Ditto came by, Skeffington held the handshake just a bit longer. "Ditto, Ditto," he murmured, "how in the world do you thank a man for a million laughs?"

"I beg pardon, Governor?" Ditto said. "I didn't quite catch all of that."

"No matter. Good-bye, Ditto."

"Good-bye, Governor. And I'll be back here every day, Johnny at the spot, as we say." He went downstairs jauntily; at the door he said to Adam, "The Governor looks grand, doesn't he, Adam?"

"He looks grand, Ditto."

"You can't lick a man like that," Ditto said.

Upstairs, Skeffington was saying good-bye to Weinberg and Gorman He took both men by the hand, he looked at them and smiled. "Good times," he said "A lot of good times."

"Frank," Weinberg said "You'll do all right. Anywhere"

Gorman nodded

"Ah, Frank," he said softly. "You've done grand things. Grand, grand things."

"Among others," Skeffington said. "But no regrets. No regrets at all. And my thanks to both of you. For everything."

His voice was weak now. He closed his eyes, in a moment, one hand was raised in a small farewell salute. The nurse whispered, "He's going to get a little sleep now."

Weinberg and Gorman tiptoed from the room.

As they walked down the front stairs, Weinberg began to move faster, and when he reached the bottom he was almost running across the hall and out of the front door. Gorman followed more slowly, looking neither to the right nor to the left In their departure, neither man spoke a single word.

ADAM was sitting in the library, staring out at the front lawn, when the doctor abruptly entered the room and said, "Do you know what priest he wants? Did he say?"

Adam jumped up and said, "Yes. Monsignor Burke."

"I think you'd better call him now. Tell him that it's urgent. And see if you can locate young Francis. He isn't here."

Adam telephoned the Monsignor, and then began calling hotels and restaurants, even the city law office where, in theory, Francis Jr. was employed Finally, he gave up; he hoped that through some sudden miraculous dawning of responsibility his cousin might decide to come home.

Monsignor Burke arrived swiftly. He was a very tall old man with a long, lined, homely face. He nodded to Adam and they hurried up the stairs together.

Skeffington's room had been prepared. At the head of the bed was a small table; covered with a white cloth; on this were two candles, a crucifix, holy water, a spoon, several small balls of cotton. Skeffington's eyes were closed; his breathing was fast and shallow.

The Monsignor bent over him. "Frank?"

Skeffington's eyes opened; he whispered, "Hello, Hugh."

"Frank, I want to hear your confession now."

Skeffington nodded The nurse, the doctor and Adam went out into the hall. Adam heard a car pull up in front of the house; he looked out of the window and saw Maeve coming up the front path. And to his intense annoyance, he saw that she was not alone: her father had come with

her—presumably, Adam thought bitterly, to protect her from the dying giant

He went downstairs to meet them at the door. Maeve said quickly, "Daddy came in by surprise just as I was leaving the house."

"Yes," her father said. "And I thought I'd better come along. It's not a pleasant journey for a young girl to make alone."

"It's not too dangerous now, though," Adam said. "You see, he's dying: even if you hadn't come she probably wouldn't have been harmed at all."

"Adam, *please,*" Maeve said, imploringly "Please, not now." Shifting, she said, "What about your uncle? Is he really . . . ?"

Her voice died out, avoiding the final words. Adam nodded. "The priest's with him now. Come on up."

When they reached the top of the stairs, Adam saw that the confession was over; the doctor and nurse were just going in. Adam, taking Maeve by the arm, followed, trailed by the uninvited guest. They knelt.

The priest, bending over Skeffington, was administering the Communion.

Softly the old Monsignor murmured the grave and final formula, heard only at the hour of death *"Accipe Viaticum corporis Domini . . . ."*

The Monsignor straightened; after a moment, he began the ritual proper of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction.

Skeffington lay motionless on his bed; he gave no sign of life. All in the room had remained kneeling; from the corner of his eye Adam saw, at the door, the cook and the maid; they were weeping quietly. He felt Maeve's hand gripping his, hard; in her eyes, too, he saw tears.

When the last prayer was over, and the Monsignor had motioned them to rise, the doctor went to the bedside; he said, "Frank?" There was no acknowledgment, but the doctor felt a faint pulse beat. There was an awed, a dreadful silence in the room. It was broken by Maeve's father.

"Well, Monsignor," he said, with a terrible tolerance, "he's made his peace with God now. No matter what some of us may have thought in the past, I think we can say this: that knowing what he knows now, if he had it all to do over again, there's not the slightest doubt but that he'd do it all very, very differently!"

It was a statement awful in its smugness Maeve gasped and said, "Oh, *Daddy!*" The Monsignor turned sharply away and Adam felt anger blaze. He wanted to shout this pompous fool out of the house. But there was no need for any of them to answer. For the figure on the bed stirred, and they saw that Skeffington had raised himself slightly. His eyes were wide open, and in them they saw the old challenging, mocking gleam. And they heard his voice as, taking charge now for the last time, he gave his answer:

"The hell I would!"

The words came out in a hoarse whisper, but they were loud and undefeated.

Adam felt like cheering. He watched his uncle: Skeffington was turning his head slowly, looking at them all. After a moment, he said, quite distinctly, "Francis?"

There was no answer.

Agonized, Adam said, "He went out for a moment, Uncle Frank. He'll be back immediately."

"He has a grand sense of timing," Skeffington said.

He slipped back. His head turned, very slowly, to look at them all again. When he came to Maeve, he paused and smiled. Then he looked at Adam. For one moment, no one else might have been in the room. Skeffington smiled again—there was just a faint flicker of his left eyelid, and he spoke his last words to Adam.

"See you around," he whispered.

CHAPTER 11

SKEFFINGTON's funeral was the largest ever held in the city. It followed a three-day wake which had seen thousands of mourners file into the big house on the Boulevard. At the service, the church was jammed to the doors, and the crowd bulged into the street and out along the pavements. The Governor had come with all his official family; state and civic officials, justices, commissioners were squeezed together in the pews flanking the centre aisle; uniformed policemen and firemen were several rows deep; there were delegations from the lodges and associations to which Skeffington had belonged: The Knights of Columbus, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Sons of Italy, the Eagles, the Elks,

the American Legion, the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick. But in the pew reserved for the family of the deceased, only Adam and Maeve knelt beside a nervous, white-faced Francis Jr. Throughout the wake, Francis had remained in his room, remorseful, distraught and utterly helpless; but this morning he was holding himself under tight control for which Adam was most grateful.

The Cardinal was pointedly absent from the service; but, to Adam's surprise, Monsignor Burke had been permitted by the Cardinal to deliver a eulogy for his old friend.

It was neither long nor elaborate, but it was curiously moving, possibly because it dwelled, for the most part, on Skeffington as a private man. "I suppose," Burke ended, "that there was at least some truth in many of the things, good and bad, that were said about Frank Skeffington. The bigger the man is in public life, the bigger the praise or the blame. I know little of the truth about it. I can only say that, as I look around me at this city in which I have lived for so long, it seems to me now to be a better city for most of the people than it used to be, and I suspect that Frank Skeffington played at least a part in making it that way. And it seems to me that to have left the lot of many of those around you a little bit better than it was, to have been genuinely loved by a great many people, and to have died in God's good grace is no small thing to have happened to any man That is what happened to Frank Skeffington; I hope it may happen as well for all of us."

The church was quiet; swiftly the ceremonies were concluded Many of those who had been in the church accompanied the procession to the cemetery; others did not. . . .

NATHANIEL GARDINER did not. As he left the church, it was beginning to snow; but he turned his coat collar up and started to walk, with short quick strides, to his down-town offices. And so, he thought, there goes Frank Skeffington.

The thought depressed him. Looking back over the past fifty years, Gardiner thought that the man's entire career seemed to have been devoted to the contravention of the law. He thought of roads constructed unnecessarily, at three times their normal cost; he thought of contracts skilfully diverted to political friends; he thought of tax rebates handed out in wholesale lots to campaign contributors. Yet even as he thought

this, a slight smile appeared on his lips, for he remembered the other side, too the good-humoured audacity of the man; his courage, generosity, charm and sheer ability.

Gardiner shook his head. He said to himself, as so often before *if only he had not been such a rogue.*

And now there was McCluskey. The old buccaneer had at least been a vivid, unforgettable personality · he had been succeeded by the spear-head of a generation of ciphers. The old philanthropist shrugged pessimistically and, pulling his coat more tightly round him, continued briskly in the direction of his offices.

Charlie Hennessey drove his own car to the cemetery. By his side was Festus Garvey, who had decided he would see things safely through to the end.

Charlie made no concessions to the demands of traffic. As he drove he talked continually, sometimes making interesting little experiments, such as driving with one eye closed to test his peripheral vision. His progress was unfailingly hazardous, even in this slow motorcade; several times he bumped the car preceding him.

"Easy easy easy!" cried Festus irritably. "For the love o' God, will you watch where you're goin'!" The last bump had jostled him severely, disturbing his train of thought. Festus was already planning for the future. the snow, falling steadily now, had reminded him of the profitable snow-removal contracts that would have to be given out by the new city administration this winter Oh, he would have his finger in *that* pie, all right!

"Be calm, my dear man," Charlie said reprovingly "Remember, no excitement at your age. The little vessels in the brain are all dried up; they could snap and pop like Rice Krispies at any moment Men younger than you are dropping like flies in the street every day." He switched from helpful counsel to the affairs of the moment "I saw your tame dunce McCluskey in church," he said, "wearing the frock coat and the striped trousers. And I saw where he sneaked off as soon as the Mass was over. He's not coming to the cemetery."

With the election over Garvey could afford to be less bellicose and somewhat more candid. "No," he said indifferently. "He's got to go somewheres. With the wife."

"Bad politics, my dear man," Charlie said. "Oh, very bad politics at this stage of the game. He should be right out there by the grave with the wife and kids and the hired dog, where everybody could see him."

Garvey shrugged. "He's in for four years, and four years from now they'll all forget whether he did or he didn't go to the grave. People forget fast. Just like," he said, in a suddenly violent voice, "they'll forget that big lummox that had the nerve to lock me out of City Hall and that's ridin' today in the hearse up there! Inside six months they'll forget all about him and his big voice and his hip-hip-hoorays for Skeffington!"

"That big vein is jumping about in your forehead again," Charlie said, looking at him critically. "You'll go up like a jet plane one of these days. And of course that's all nonsense what you're saying, my dear man. You could live to be a hundred and twenty-five and put new red, white and blue posters of yourself all round town every day, and still they wouldn't think of you as often as they will of Frank Skeffington when he's been dead fifty years. The difference is that they all loved him and nobody loves you I say this is no criticism of you. It's not your fault. It's all in the genes· you're not responsible. But facts are facts, my dear man, and the fact is that Frank Skeffington was a rascal with a heart as big as the state of Kansas and a marvellous way with all kinds of people There was none like it."

Garvey's face had been reddening dangerously; with a little howl of rage he raised his right hand, but at that moment Charlie's car jumped ahead slightly, bumping the car before it once again; Garvey was hurled against the dashboard

"For the love of God!" he cried desperately. "I tell you, easy, easy, EASY!" He sank back into his corner, fuming quietly for the rest of the ride, while Charlie continued to talk about Skeffington.

Norman Cass had not even gone to the church. From the windows of his office, he viewed the cortège winding through the down-town streets; and, looking down upon it, he permitted himself the faintest of smiles. The man who had humiliated him was at last leaving the scene; Norman Cass felt no distress. That evening he had arranged a small dinner party for Mayor-Elect and Mrs. McCluskey; he did not think that this aspiring young couple would fail to be impressed by their fellow guests. A new

day was unquestionably dawning, and the greatest single threat to that day was even now disappearing down the street. It was a thought to elevate the spirit.

THE CARDINAL'S secretary left the church after Mass and drove back to the Cardinal's palace; there, he reported on Monsignor Burke's eulogy to his superior. The Cardinal groaned. "Poor innocent Hugh. And no one laughed, I trust?"

"No, *Eminenza* Actually, it was quite moving."

"And also quite inaccurate. Listen to Hugh Burke and you'll find that every scoundrel in the city has a heart of pure gold. Hugh has never tried to run a diocese with a schemer in City Hall who would stop at nothing, absolutely *nothing,* to bend and twist the Church to his own purposes."

The Monsignor hesitated. "Still, you permitted the eulogy."

"Because it was the best way to handle a difficult situation," the Cardinal said simply. "If there had been no eulogy, there would have been newspaper stories, all the old tales resurrected about Skeffington and the Cardinal. We would have had, once again, this linking in the public mind of Skeffington and the Church. One small, politic gesture, of no significance whatever, was all that was required to forestall it No one, of course, would have realized the implications of all this more completely than Skeffington himself."

With a wintry little smile the Cardinal began to walk slowly out of the room, shuffling slightly. The old prelate had aged greatly in the past year; it was a thought which pained his secretary, for he was very fond of this severe old man who had been kind to him. And he thought of him now in connection with Skeffington. The old giants who had shaped an age and a city were leaving, one by one. As one of their inheritors, the young Monsignor thought of this with sadness, for he realized that they had been unique men who had done much, and he hated to see them go.

IN THE newspaper building, Amos Force sat at his desk. Opposite him, at a respectful distance, sat the managing editor.

"A terrible man," Force said. "Utterly unprincipled. He cost us money. Twice. I don't know if you remember that."

"Oh yes," the managing editor said fervently.

"At no time did he ever deceive me. He came of bad stock. His mother was a maid in our house when I was a boy. My father had to dismiss her for stealing food. Like mother, like son And both punished in the end. And yet there are those who tell us that there is not a Higher Justice!"

The managing editor was silent, but he, too, was glad that Skeffington was gone Now his employer would go home · the awful, inescapable, summoning voice would no longer be heard through the corridors every night and day. The managing editor could get back to business During the campaign the paper had slipped He had seen, once again, the glow of the superfluous electric light, in the sports department the carbon-paper supply was diminishing with suspicious rapidity, someone—and he thought he knew who—was wasting the liquid soap in the third floor men's room; three slugs had been found in a chewing-gum machine. With Skeffington gone, the managing editor would be let alone; he would bring the paper back.

At the cemetery, the crowd had begun to disperse. Weinberg and Gorman walked off together, silently. After a moment Weinberg said, "A tough day."

"It is," Gorman said. "They'll come no tougher."

"Yeh," Weinberg said. "Yeh. That's for sure. Well . . . ." He shrugged and said, "So long I'll see you. Tomorrow."

Gorman nodded; Weinberg went off to his car and Gorman began to walk towards his own car. On the way he encountered Ditto; the fat man's little face was blotched with recent tears Gorman said kindly, "Hello, Ditto. Be a good lad, now, and keep the chin high. You come round in a day or so to see me, and we'll have a chat." He patted Ditto gently on the shoulder. "Go home now and get yourself a little rest."

Ditto nodded dumbly and went off, and Gorman was continuing to his car when he saw Adam.

"Well," he said, "everything went as nice as you could wish. Everybody there, just the way he'd have liked it." He looked towards Adam's car. "Is the son with you?"

"Yes. He seems to want to go straight home"

Even as Adam answered, Gorman turned back to look at the little hill

he had so recently left. "He was a grand man!" he said, with rare emotion. "Oh, a grand man entirely! Remember that, boy, no matter what they try to tell you We never had a man like him!"

Adam saw moisture in the old man's eyes. He said, "I know, Mr. Gorman. I know he was."

The old man inhaled sharply. "Ah well," he said. He put out his hand, and Adam took it. "Good-bye now," he said. With a little gesture of farewell, he got into his car.

THEY DROVE swiftly and in silence to Skeffington's house. There Maeve and Adam tried to persuade Francis Jr. to go home with them. But, although he thanked them profusely, he got out of the car.

"Because," he said, with a wisdom rather odd in him, "if I did go over to your place, I'd only have to come back here sooner or later, wouldn't I?" He started to turn towards the house and then, with his hand still on the car door, he turned back to look at them. "Adam, I want to thank you and Maeve for everything. I guess I wasn't as much help as I should have been. I *wanted* to be, but you know how it was, Adam."

Adam said, "You did all right, Junior."

"Well," Francis Jr. said, "I guess I'd better go in. So long. And thanks again." He turned to go up the front path. For a long moment he stood staring at the house. Then he began to walk, very quickly, reached the front door, and disappeared.

"Oh, *Adam!*" Maeve had been gripping the front edge of the car seat. "Adam, we should have *made* him come home with us!"

"Well," Adam said, starting the car, "at least he could make himself go in. For Junior, that's not so bad. It may even be a good sign. Anyway, let's hope so." He looked across at his wife and smiled; he put one hand on hers. "A rough few days," he said. "And, in the words of Junior, thanks for everything."

Maeve said nothing; she smiled back and held his hand tightly. They drove home. At the house Adam said, almost too casually, "I think I'll leave the car here and walk down to the paper this morning."

It was a remarkably unpleasant day for a walk, but Maeve said, "All right, darling." He felt her sympathy and love.

It was a curious walk. He had wanted to think quietly about his uncle.

Instead, into his head came rushing an army of impressions, each one vivid, each one different, each one struggling against all others for the dominant place in memory He found that he could not concentrate for more than an instant on Skeffington's death, for Skeffington alive, in multiple, unforgettable guises, kept getting in the way.

At his office he worked on his neglected Little Simp strip all afternoon. It was nearly six o'clock when he finished for the day. He called a cab, and when he gave his address to the driver he added, "Go by way of the Boulevard I'll tell you when to turn off."

As he travelled along the familiar route, he closed his eyes Once again he was riding with his uncle along this street at night, making still another swift foray into that strange and heady world of Gorman, Weinberg, Ditto, Charlie Hennessey and Mother Garvey. And in memory, he heard once more the deep, musical voice, he saw the wave of the hand, the gleam of the eye; he heard the laughter and cheers of excited, jubilant crowds . . .

He shook his head savagely and opened his eyes. They were approaching the wide turn; the house was visible

"That big house, up on the left," the driver said. "That's where Governor Skeffington lived. A great guy I drove him around a couple of times. You want to know what he did once?"

"Yes," said Adam. "Slow down, will you?"

The cab slowed "Well, one time," said the driver, "it must of been maybe twenty years ago, I got him in my cab and he starts talking to me. You know, asking me questions, like how long I been driving a cab, how many kids I got, and like that. So anyways, I tell him about my kid, he's only ten years old, and he's a baseball nut You know, reads them up in the papers, knows all the batting averages, and the big deal is naturally Babe Ruth. So he listens all the time, you know, just like he was just another guy, and then I let him off, and he says so long. *One week later,*" the cab driver said impressively, slowing down even more, "one week later, you know what my kid gets in the parcel post?"

"No," said Adam

They were abreast of the house now. Adam leaned forward, peering out of the window Snow had begun to fall again, and the street light beamed faintly against the front of the darkened house.

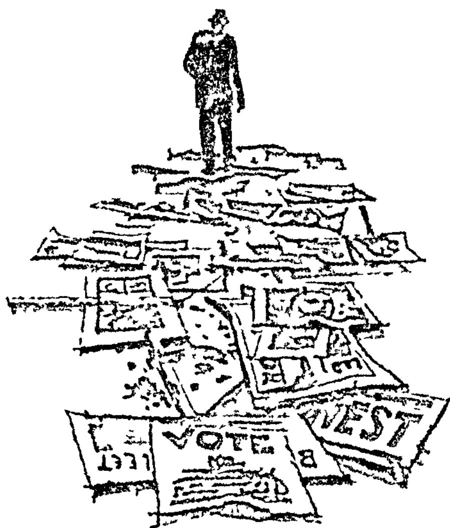
"A autographed baseball," said the driver, "by BABE RUTH!

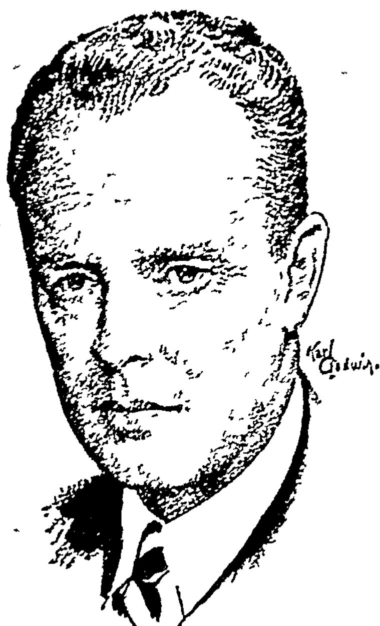
Whaddaya think of that? And I don't even know he's got my name! The Governor, I mean. What a great guy! Right?"

Adam nodded. "A great guy," he said absently. They were pulling away from the house now but it was still visible. For just an instant, through some queer trick of the imagination, it seemed to Adam that, through the dim light and the softly falling snow, he could see the ghosts of the lines that had once formed at the door, and now would form no more. And he knew, with one quick, final ache, that he would miss his uncle very much, in ways he did not yet know; and he knew, too, that in missing him he would never be alone.

The cab swerved round another bend; the house was gone.

The pilgrimage, and with it a part of his life, was over; he was going home.





Edwin O'Connor

EDWIN O'CONNOR was born in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1918, and after leaving college he worked for several years as a radio announcer, writer and producer in New England Following his wartime service in the Coast Guard, he decided to devote himself entirely to writing, and has contributed frequently to leading magazines, including *The Reader's Digest*

His first novel, *The Oracle,* was published here in 1952, and its royalties financed a trip to Dublin, his favourite city next to Boston where he now lives and works as a radio and television columnist He has "made the pilgrimage" to Ireland faithfully every year since then.



Illustrations by Charles Hawes

MY SON GOGGLE

or the Education of a Father

A condensation of the book by

BENTZ PLAGEMANN



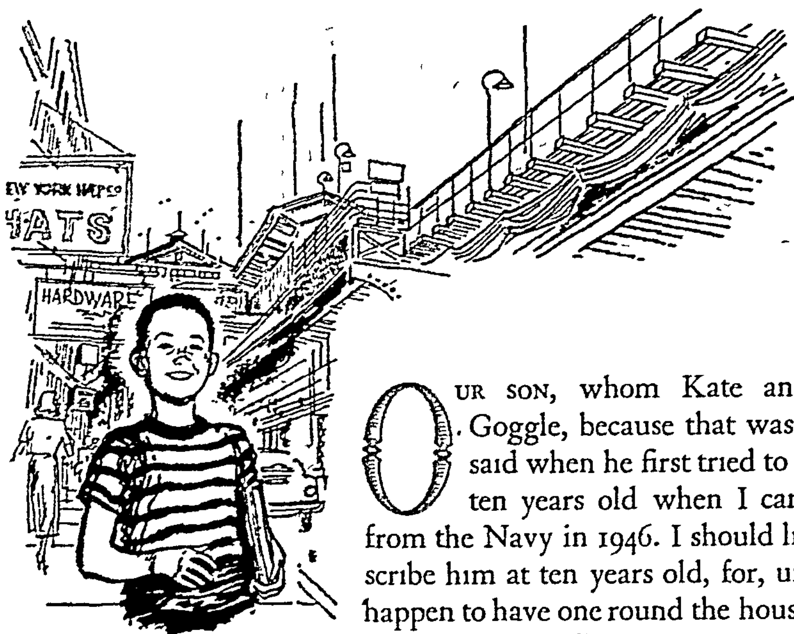
"My Son Goggle" is published by Victor Gollancz, London

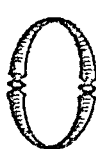
Everyone who has ever been a parent—for that matter, everyone who remembers his own childhood—will recognize Goggle. He's that boy who is racing towards manhood at breakneck speed, though to him the time from birthday to birthday is an eternity. Whether he is pleading for an air-gun, or falling head over heels in love, or getting into trouble with the adult world, he's exasperating and lovable in equal parts. This is a delightful story of a father's education at the hands of one of the most appealing boy characters ever created.

"I give this book the full accolade—I haven't come across a better in ten years."

—*The Yorkshire Post*





OUR SON, whom Kate and I call Goggle, because that was what he said when he first tried to talk, was ten years old when I came home from the Navy in 1946. I should like to describe him at ten years old, for, unless you happen to have one round the house, almost no one has actually ever seen a ten-year-old boy. Usually they manage to blend in with the woodwork like chameleons, or they are upstairs being made to stay in their room for thirty minutes, or they are out in the back garden hanging upside down in a tree.

Our Goggle at ten stood maybe four feet high and he weighed about as much as a bushel of potatoes. He seemed to be made of sterner stuff than his poor mortal parents Something like vulcanized rubber, or the plastic they make these new dolls from—which feels like human flesh but is unbreakable and will not crack. If Goggle bumped into you he left a bruise, and a session of rough-house with him was rather like commando training. He was never ill Bacteria shunned him.

He had stubby black hair like hog's bristles, and his nails were worn down below the quick, and there was a wart just below his right elbow. He walked on his heels the way small boys do, especially on Saturday

mornings when Papa wanted to sleep You couldn't escape the sound of his voice anywhere. He hated to lose any game, whether Chinese checkers or baseball, and he only did lose, of course, when the other guys wouldn't obey the rules. His face was generally contorted with some sort of violent emotion—anger, or laughter, or passionate interest—and this, together with his constant movement, gave the impression that he lived inside himself only with the greatest difficulty. When he was finally caught up within himself at night, he fell into such deep and instant sleep that not even the United States Marine Band could have wakened him.

He was always soiled but never what you might call dirty His face was smudged and his hands were rough and grubby and when he undressed at night there was a dust shadow round his ankles, but even so, looking at him, you knew you'd never again in your whole life be as clean as he was. His idea of a bath—although I don't suppose you could say that a bath was ever his idea—was to float lazily in the tub, humming to himself, until steps were taken ("Good Lord, Goggle, aren't you ever coming out!"), and then to leap out and rub the soil from himself on to a clean towel, which he dropped on the floor.

In his bedroom his clothes were deposited in little moist, sodden mounds: socks and underwear here, jerseys and corduroys there. Subsequent layers—parts of aeroplane models, and hub caps, and comic books, and old carburettors—covered them quickly It all looked and smelt rather like a bird's nest

On my first night home from the Navy I didn't know all this about him because I hadn't seen him for what seemed like a very long time, and I remember the way my heart bumped against my ribs as I ran up the stairs to our apartment in an old building in New York. Goggle was at the door waiting for me. (He had been waiting for me, upstairs and down, for almost two hours, Kate told me later) I stooped down in my Navy top-coat and took him in my arms, and he was a little stiff and shy with me at first (we were both quite awe-struck at the sight of each other), but I took a good, big inhale of corduroy trousers and damp wool, and of his own warm animal smell, something like a pony

"What did you bring me?" he asked

"Oh, Goggle!" his mother said, standing behind him. She was laughing and crying and flushed, and in that first minute she didn't seem

like a wife and mother at all, but more like the girl I had married. She was a little shy, too, and very pretty, just as I remembered her, only prettier, maybe, because her character was beginning to show through in more worn places than it had before. She had been through a few things herself.

I led the way into the parlour and dumped my kit-bag on the floor and took out the Japanese flag for which I had swapped two tubes of Pepsodent tooth-paste (they ate it, I think), and the Nazi belt buckle, and the triangular section of a sponge-rubber map, the Bay of St Tropez, it was.

"You're home," Kate said when I stood up. "The war is really over. You're home."

She looked good enough to eat. "Sure the war is over," I said. "I even have a mimeographed letter from the chaplain saying I can come to him any time I have trouble with my rehabilitation."

"Mercy," Kate said, laughing "Isn't he going to let me try my hand at that first?"

"I was rather counting on that myself," I said

Suddenly a preoccupied look came over her face, a look with which I was to become very familiar. "Where's Goggle?" she said. "Goggle! What are you doing?"

Goggle was in the hall, talking on the telephone We could hear his high, excited voice ". . . and all those guys were dead, see, and there's this flag, see, and he cut off this belt buckle, see . . . ."

"Goggle!" his mother called.

The telephone banged down on the table and Goggle came back into the room.

"What are you doing?" Kate asked.

"I called Artie," Goggle said, "and he's coming over, and he's going to tell Sam . . . ."

"Oh, Goggle!" Kate said. "Not on your father's first night home!"

"But you *promised!*" Goggle wailed.

"I did no such thing," Kate said "I said *some time*. I wanted the three of us to spend the first evening alone."

"Oh, what does it matter?" I interrupted, in a placating tone. "The first evening home is bound to be a bit hectic. Things will quieten down."

Kate turned to me with a curiously desperate look. "Dear," she said, "I wouldn't want to disillusion you on your first evening home. . . ."

At that moment the doorbell rang. It was Artie. He had flown over, I believe, in his Superman cape

LATER in the evening, after Goggle's pals were gone and he had been tucked into bed, squirming with protest, Kate and I sat together in our bedroom having a last cigarette before turning out the light, that wonderful moment of the day which is one of the rarest dividends of marriage.

"Your hair is beautiful," I said. She was brushing it, sitting at the mirror of her dressing-table, wearing a flowered dressing-gown, just as she had always done every night of our married life together. Watching her upraised arm, the hair pulled back by the brush, the line of her neck and shoulder, I felt like a neglected potted plant, being watered again after a long, long arid time. I felt it right down to my toes.

She put one hand to her face, defensively. "My hair is awful, and look at my nails! I did want to be pretty for you when you got home, but, oh dear, my life is nothing but chocolate pudding and dirty dungarees, and socks with holes in the toes."

"You look very, very pretty to me," I said.

"But I keep thinking I haven't done very well. You just can't be a father *and* a mother. You have to have a man about."

"I think you've done very well indeed," I said. I could see the line concern had drawn between her eyes, and I tried to smooth it away with the palm of my hand

IN LESS THAN twenty-four hours I understood that line between Kate's eyes I felt like a man who has stepped backward on to a moving merry-go-round and can't fight his way off. During my first week at home the following incidents occupied our attention:

A note from Goggle's teacher, whom he called Miss Bilgewater (her name being Miss Waterford), to say that he was failing in spelling, arithmetic and study period, and summoning us to a conference on a movable feast called Home Room Day.

A telephone call from Miss Carbury, the maiden lady who lived in the apartment above us, to ask if we knew who had rubbed her Pekinese

with garlic. (Thank heaven it isn't easy to leave finger-prints on a Pekinese!) And an ominous visit from George, our building superintendent, who reported, breathing heavily, that the street department wanted to know how three street lights in our block had been broken. When I asked Goggle if he knew anything about the broken street lights, he merely turned his soiled face up to mine, looking like a fallen angel, and said, "Who, me?"

We were interrupted at this moment by a telephone call from the Murrays, in the apartment below us They did hate to bother us again, but could our bath be running over? Little drops, something like water, were falling from their bathroom ceiling again, just like last week. In the resulting naval confusion, the scuttling of the bath fleet, the flourish of mops and pails, I never did find out about the broken street lights. I didn't really want to know. I was beginning to discover the depths of cowardice which being the father of a ten-year-old son reveals in a man. If you are the parent of one, never ask for whom the policeman calls; he calls for thee.

Goggle was only five when I went away in 1941, a little, fat, sturdy, pink object in perpetual motion And babies fool you They look so permanent. All through the war, Goggle, in my mind, was still just learning to roller-skate. He was building snowmen in the park. He was asking, "What is that?" and "Why?" and trying to be a big boy and not cry when he fell down and bumped his knee

But when I came home this terrible thing had happened behind my back. Goggle was ten He was also master of the house he lived in, a condition which he wasted no time in making clear to me On that memorable first evening at home, I had seen him take a cigarette from the box on the coffee table and light it with a match, and hand it to Kate, who took it absently and put it to her lips, while Goggle had watched me, carefully, from the corners of his eyes, the way a boy does when he is testing you.

Later, when I asked Kate about the cigarette routine, she explained that when she had caught Artie and Sam and Goggle sneaking cigarettes she had decided to bring it right out in the open "I let him light my cigarettes for me," she said. "He gets that first awful puff, with the sulphur. It may kill his taste."

"I hope sulphur isn't habit-forming," I said. I didn't tell Kate about

the quick stab of jealousy I had felt in my solar plexus when I saw her take the cigarette from him. Goggle had been the man of the house while I was away He wouldn't give up that role easily. The look he had given me said, "D'ya wanta make somethin' of it?" I, ahem, did want to make something of it. But I didn't want to become that dull something called a parent. I didn't want to find myself on the enemy side, with a lot of dreary old people. And as I brooded on this, a wonderfully clever and original scheme came into my mind. I would be one of the guys I would be Goggle's pal.

Meanwhile, we had to go to that conference with Miss Bilgewater on Home Room Day, when the products of the minds and the hands of the young were set out on display for the approbation of their parents. Kate and I set out nervously, brushed and tidy, wearing appropriate smiles, like a committee about to visit the industrial shop in a reformed jail.

The small criminals had been banished to the playground and we were greeted by Miss Waterford, a gentle, silvery lady, half crazed after four decades spent with her charges "It isn't that Goggle is negative," she said to Kate and me, in her soft voice carefully pitched below madness. "It's just that he seems to be living in some other world."

I walked away, like a man unable to stand outside the operating-room while the patient is on the table, leaving Kate to confer with Miss Waterford, while I examined the perfect arithmetic papers, the essays without flaw, the brilliant water colours pinned to the wall Goggle's work was not represented, and neither had he contributed to the baked and glazed clay objects displayed on a low shelf under the windows. The girls had made strings of bright clay beads, while the boys had turned out dish-like trays in the shape of a grape leaf.

When I summoned up nerve enough to ask Miss Waterford where Goggle's grape leaf was, she gave a small, unhappy laugh and turned to a closed cabinet. "With Goggle I must confess I have failed," she said, and handed me, gingerly, an unglazed, brown, indented object, rather distasteful in effect, like dried buffalo dung. "All small boys go through a primitive stage," she explained.

"Is there something we should do about it?" Kate asked, in the tremulous, guilt-ridden tone of the modern parent.

"Guidance and example," Miss Waterford said simply. "Perhaps now that Father is home . . . ."

I ran my finger round inside my collar, wondering if I should confess to Miss Waterford that Goggle got his primitive side from me. But I merely promised her that we would try to do better, and we went on home. Kate was silent and gloomy, but I was cheerful. I was going to be Goggle's pal.

To GET to his school, Goggle had to walk to the end of our street, cross the park, then cross Lexington and Third Avenues, and go one block farther east. At least that is the way I would have done it What Goggle did was to go down the street as far as *here,* and then cross over, because the guy who owned the fruit and vegetable shop was off his rocker and he might rush out and grab you and holler for the cops because he was convinced you were the guy who had snitched the avocado pears and smashed them at the fire hydrant. ("Were *you* the guy?" I asked "Who, me?" said Goggle.)

After that, you went up a block and over to meet Sam, and then you went back one block to meet Artie, because no guy ever crossed Third Avenue alone. It was murder. Those guys on Third Avenue waited in gangs for the guys who went to the Day School.

As Sam and Artie and Goggle and I approached Third Avenue, a subtle metamorphosis began to take place. Movements became furtive, voices deepened, faces took on a sinister look, and everyone began to spit and shout loudly in patois. "Whatsa matta, heh?" Goggle yelled at Sam as they scuttled across under the lattice-like shadows of the elevated railway. And "Wanna getcha jaw busted?" Sam yelled back. Enemies lurked in every pawnshop doorway, to be threatened or placated by a flourish of arms

We all breathed more easily as we swept down into the side street And there, in a minute, was the school. Half an hour remained before the bell would ring, so there was time to get in an innings or so of baseball. The baseball diamond was a patch of cement hemmed in by tall buildings. Heavy wire mesh covered the adjacent walls and stretched across the open space on the street, to protect the passers-by. It all looked rather like a progressive zoo, where the animals are shown in their native habitat.

It was apparent at once that I had no business being there. When the other guys thought that I was actually going to stop and try to join them,

their faces closed up like clams. Goggle suddenly did not know me. Everything halted—play, shouting and laughter. At last I smiled and gave a senile nod, pretending that I was merely going by.

But I hid for a moment among the dust-bins in an area two doors down. I didn't need a brick wall to fall on me, I thought, as the wonderful sounds of my own boyhood came ringing back to me in the clear morning air I couldn't be Goggle's pal. I was going to have to be his father, and that, as almost any man can tell you, is a much more difficult job, even though it does have rewards no pal can ever know, strung along like bright torches to light the way.

In the evening, after homework was finished, we played rummy or Chinese checkers or we talked Presently it would be time for Goggle to go to bed. "You have to come in and sit with me," he would demand. I would go into his room and fit myself carefully into the child's chair beside his bed, while Goggle threw off his clothes in all directions and leaped into his poor bed, which received him with shrieks of pain. Then he would snuggle down, even his ears wiggling with delight, and our evening ritual would begin. In the darkness, with only the light from the hall falling into the room, I began to see what the war had been for Goggle

On my first night home, when he asked me for a story, I had stalled by making the requirement that he tell one first, and he had told me a dirty joke I was grateful for the darkness so that he could not see my look of astonishment, and every night after that we had another appalling story, a dreary bathroom joke, or an anatomical joke, such as small boys tell. I did not stop him because it had seemed imperative that he tell me these stories. He never told me one that I did not remember hearing in my own boyhood, but I had not told these stories to my father; the thought was inconceivable Yet Goggle offered them to me in the most touchingly eager way, just as a puppy, wagging its tail, might bring a bone to a man, because it was all he had to give, or because it seemed appropriate to offer the most cherished possession; the smutty joke or the chewed bone offered with the same moving desire for approval, the same impulsive love

So then I began to think that this was what the war had done for Goggle, the dirty jokes and the four-letter words he used to me marked

his fumbling way of saying: while you were away I did not fail you; I was a man. I encouraged him to tell me the stories. We will dredge it all up, I thought, and be done with it Maybe this was therapeutic

But one evening I lost my temper.

It was after dinner and we were in the parlour. A desultory conversation was going on between Goggle and his mother, when suddenly Goggle said a really shockingly offensive word.

I looked at him quickly over the top of my newspaper and I could see by the impish expression on his face that this was the act of a small boy trying to irritate his mother. The sudden noise I heard was the blood rushing to my head. When I stopped seeing spots in front of my eyes, I put my paper down, stood up slowly, moved to Goggle deliberately, took him gently by one flopping, overgrown ear and led him off to his room.

"Now," I said, and in order to explain what followed I must digress for a moment During my time in the Navy I had once been fortunate enough to serve with possibly the most accomplished master of profanity in the world. He was a bos'n's mate on a destroyer, which takes you out of the amateur class anyway, and he was an Irishman who had grown up on the South Side of Chicago. When he let go with a few brief words, the result was a kind of poetry so electrifying that you never forgot it

"Goggle," I said, "you don't know how to handle some of these words you use Now hear this. . " And with that I let him have it, just as Clancy might have let him have it on the tin can

I think we may dismiss as exaggeration Kate's contention that the paint on the door frame was blistered Goggle stood there with round eyes and open mouth, and when I had finished I said, "Never let me hear you use any of these words again until you have learned to use them like a man " He fell back, stunned. I slammed the door and went back to the parlour, breathing heavily.

Kate sat on the sofa pressing a sofa cushion against her face, her shoulders shaking. Brute, I said to myself You lose your temper and abuse your son and affront the delicate ears of your good wife with billingsgate.

Kate lowered the sofa cushion slowly and reached for her handkerchief to wipe her streaming eyes. "I've never been so relieved in my life," she

said, "but I didn't think he ought to hear me, and I couldn't stop laughing." And up went the sofa cushion again.

There were times during this period when Goggle reminded me of that famous quick-change artist who used to play all the roles in *Oliver Twist,* going in one door as Fagin while he came out of another door as Bill Sikes or the Artful Dodger. Our own little Artful Dodger might be sitting in his room reading a forbidden comic book instead of doing his homework, while he waited to trip a string with his foot which would upset a tin full of flour on George, our building superintendent, when he came out of the cellar door below the window.

The thing to do was to keep calm, pivoting where you stood to meet each new crisis. The thing *not* to do was to lose your head.

George was the perfect example of what can happen to the man who gets "shook up" (Goggle's term) by a small boy. A marked deterioration had begun to be noticeable in George. To escape the peal of ringing doorbells into which pins had been stuck, the anger of tenants whose letter-box name-plates had been switched, and the echoing taunts of small criminals who disappeared up fire-escapes or down holes in the pavement, it was rumoured that George now spent his afternoons in his basement apartment, drinking red wine.

His flushed appearance seemed to bear this out as he came to us one afternoon, his tobacco-stained moustache bristling with outrage. "I found them all down there together," he said, his broken tones filled with doom.

We were puzzled. I had joined Kate at the hall door when I heard George's voice, and we stood there and looked at each other and at him.

"Won't you sit down?" Kate said, like a character in a drawing-room comedy.

George shook his head. "They were *playing* together," he said darkly. "In the basement"

"But they're children, George," I said patiently, thinking maybe the poor guy had slipped a sprocket. "Of course they play together."

"Boys *and* girls," George said "Behind the furnace." He was beginning to perspire

"What were they doing?" I asked.

"Giggling," George said "All on top of each other."

"And when they saw you," I asked, "did they stop what they were doing?"

George shook his head. "Not them."

"Thank you for coming to us, George," I said. "We will see about it." I closed the door after him, and Kate and I went into the parlour, where we circled about awhile in silence, showing each other the corners of our eyes.

"We called it 'Doctor' when I was a boy," I said finally. "We used to examine the patients in the Browns' barn. Up in the hayloft."

"Well," Kate said, "if they must experiment, I'm glad they're such awfully *nice* children."

This remarkable *non sequitur* put an end to the conversation until Goggle came home When I asked him casually what they were up to in the cellar these days, Goggle turned to me with his familiar expression of shopworn innocence and said, "We were playing 'Murder.' You know, somebody is the corpse and hides, and then you have to find the corpse and hide there too You all pile on top of each other."

"I see," I said.

I took this explanation down to George. "It was nothing," I explained. "They were playing 'Murder.'"

George shook his head and turned away, while the steam pipes overhead hissed like a chorus of the fates. "Ha," he said.

However, Kate and I began to make plans for group activity for Goggle and his pals. The parents of the cast of "Murder" were duly consulted, and we held meetings, our goal being to get the children out of the cellars by Christmas. We organized afternoon safaris to the Museum of Natural History, to Central Park and to the Planetarium But the most intolerable group activity to Goggle and his pals was dancing class For little boys of a certain age (the age, presumably, when young men's fancies lightly turn to thoughts of "Murder") mothers of little girls are on the prowl, listing boys' names in a card file from which they never escape until they are transferred to the inactive, or married file. In a city of some eight million people, how are marriages going to be made in heaven if some means of getting the reluctant principals together isn't arranged right here on earth? So on Thursday afternoons of the winter season the whole atmosphere of the neighbourhood was blue with the anguish of little boys on their way to dancing class.

Into this steamy milieu of blue serge suits, dotted-Swiss dresses and Band-Aids, little Mary the tomboy came like a breath of fresh air. Little Mary was the only girl the guys would tolerate. She could climb trees as well as anyone, and sometimes the boys let her pitch. She had pigtails, and a sweet right uppercut, and when she wore a dress its sash hung behind tipped with mud, or it was twisted to one side in a granny knot pulled so tight she looked like a bag tied in the middle Her legs were scratched, her hair had a fancy mat effect on top, owing to the fact that her pigtails were undone and plaited only by force, and when she knocked a little boy down and jumped on his stomach his yells of delight could be heard as far as the East River. There was hardly a boy in the whole class she couldn't lick, if the fight was fair and square, and no holding. When Mary was thrown and hobbled and led to the dancing class, Goggle and Artie and Sam and Brett and the others followed.

Only after Goggle was fully dressed for the first session was it discovered that he had not bathed. To undress and go through it all again was unthinkable. "I don't *need* a bath!" Goggle said. "Smell me!"

Finally he washed, under protest, fully clothed, and while the edges were damp the exposed surfaces were clean, and, as Goggle pointed out, no one was going to see any more of him than that.

We waited somewhat apprehensively until he came home. At twilight he burst into the apartment with steam coming out of his ears, and sank into an upholstered chair, gasping, "Mary chose *me!*"

It was some time before we could get a coherent account of what had happened. Finally we learned that when all the victims had arrived at the class Miss Lacey, the dancing teacher, had announced that the boys would choose partners, a scheme so patently monstrous that any boy would have preferred an honourable death. When they were lined up on one side of the room, and the girls on the other, and Miss Lacey gave the word, little Mary had almost been trampled in the rush. The forces had to be redeployed and lined up again. This time the girls would choose partners. And Mary—oh, joy!—had chosen our Goggle.

In the twilight we all sat speechless with excitement. Here it was at last, love revealed, and in little Mary, who up to this moment had given no more indication of a tender sentiment for Goggle than a fast rabbit punch or two

It was a thrilling romance, with overtones of violence. Mary and

Goggle scuffled and yelled and knocked each other flat, they chased each other up and down stairs and along the street, hot and breathless. Their passion fed itself on enormous quantities of milk and chocolate-chip cakes, and a coterie of demented admirers followed them wherever they went.

What finally happened between the lovers we never learned. One day it was just gone. Perhaps the very intensity of the flame had caused it to burn itself out At any rate they no longer hit each other over the head, or tripped each other up from behind, or did Indian grips in the hall Goggle was silent about it "That bag!" was all he would say, in his non-committal, gentlemanly way, whenever the talk turned to Mary. To drown his sorrow he threw himself into basket-ball.

On the afternoons when basket-ball palled, Goggle performed obscure, quasi-scientific experiments in his room, which buzzed, rang, purred and clanked with the sound of motors made out of old bedsprings and Erector sets. Unexplained wires ran from under the door of his room along the wainscot in the hall, and I always closed my eyes in silent prayer whenever I turned on a battered light switch. Everything in our house was cracked but the atom.

Ignorance kept me from inquiring too closely into what went on in his room. I had been brought up on James Whitcomb Riley and *Bunny Brown and His Sister Sue,* while Goggle subscribed to scientific journals like *Space Comics.* He knew the difference between an erg, an ohm and an r.p.m., he understood the combustion engine, he knew what a carburettor did when it carburetted, and he once explained to me exactly how our radio worked, though I kept pleading with him to stop

I knew very little about his secret experiments. One thing I did know, though. He and Artie were in communication with the Sindheits, Artie wearing a walkie-talkie contraption on his head and chest, connected by a wire to the telegraph which Goggle operated in the cupboard in his bedroom And I knew who the Sindheits were, from the pictures in Goggle's comics. They were robots with canned-heat brains and eyes like the green glass insulators on telephone poles. They had jointed, multiple arms, and they rode in their rockets folded in on each other like Dixie Cups Some of them had death rays between their eyes which they could switch on or off at will.

I knew even less about Goggle's secret life outside the apartment. But there were several mysterious incidents, like the time I was on my way to the post office when the pavement opened up in front of me and Goggle came up on a loading platform. When I asked him what he was doing he said he had been helping Dan put his bicycle away. "Dan?" I asked And then a bell rang, the platform went down again and the pavement closed noiselessly over his head.

And on another day, when I suddenly saw Goggle walking in front of me down the street, and had darted up silently behind him, hoping to scare the wits out of *him* for a change, he had simply disappeared. There was a narrow space between two buildings and he slid into that. When I got there, I couldn't find any way out except to the street, but Goggle simply wasn't there. The inside walls of the space were painted black, and as I raised my eyes absently the words YOU STINK! leaped out at me in white chalk. Slightly shaken, I had gone on.

Rather late that night I looked into Goggle's bedroom, just to make sure he wasn't out with the Sindheits. Surely one of the compensations of mortality is the sight of a small boy asleep, with his breathing deep and regular, and his smudged round hands uncurled on the counterpane, and his wonderful, sweet, pungent smell, like an old hunting coat which a puppy has used for a bed. On this never-to-be-forgotten night he sat bolt upright in bed, sound asleep, held out his hand and said, "Pitch it to me!"

ONCE AGAIN the hot breath of juvenile court seemed to be scorching our necks. There was an old, abandoned brownstone house with boarded-up windows in a street near our apartment, pressed between two tall buildings. We learned that Goggle and Sam and Artie and Brett had found a way to get inside.

It was old reliable George who brought us this news. The boys climbed the fire-escape on the building next to the abandoned house, and then they leaped over to the roof of the house and climbed down through the broken skylight. I suppose nothing could be more fascinating to boys than an old empty house to explore. It was infested with rats, too, and Sam had an air rifle, and they took that with them "for protection."

Kate and I between us were able to call up all the calamities which


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might happen to them there. They might fall from the fire-escape, or between the buildings, or through the broken skylight. Dumb-waiter shafts and stairways might give way beneath them. The air-rifle shot could ricochet from the walls and hit an eye, or the vicious city rats, which often carry rabies, might attack them.

And what could we do about it? We did not know who owned the house, or what city department to notify. Action would probably take months. Charges would have to be made, a complaint filed. Meanwhile, what were we to do? Lock our boys in their rooms?

Sweetness and light fled from our home. I began to say no to everything. Goggle could not go into the old house, and he could not be out after dark, and if he was five minutes late getting home he could not go out the next day after school. All these rules and regulations, as I explained to Goggle, were designed solely for his welfare and protection. I told him not once, but at frequent intervals, like a radio commercial. Goggle did not reply. I was no longer summoned to his bedroom at night for a story or a talk. I was no longer confided in. I was simply an old bore now, the unreasonable Old Man who didn't understand boys and who ought to go back to the Navy where he came from.

The Old Man himself was depressed by present problems and by future prospects as well. So was Kate. It was hard to bring up a boy in the city, and we really didn't have to be there. Kate and I loved New York; we had a personal investment in it of many years of living and working and loving. Everything in it belonged to us in some way, from the sunsets at the ends of the streets to the lights on top of the Empire State Building. But, in all fairness to Goggle, we hadn't been children in New York City. We had both grown up in the country, with trees to climb and room to run in We thought about this, and talked about it, and one night we popped the question to Goggle. Would he like to live in the country?

A wonderful light broke over his face, like a sunset. He smiled in my direction for the first time for weeks. Would he like to live in the country! He leaped at me, and gave me such a bear hug that the bones in my neck crackled like kindling wood.

THE HOUSE we bought in a village called Cliffside, about an hour up

the Hudson River, had a dilapidated barn at the back, ideal for small boys to play in; it had trees to climb and lots of space, inside and out. "Wonderful *waste* space," Kate kept saying, with a bemused air. It had a wide centre hall, and many large, high-ceilinged rooms, and a sensible stairway with a banister for people to use who didn't have time to waste on stairs.

In appearance it was a horror, a Victorian bric-à-brac monstrosity. It looked like a river steam-boat beached by a storm, or like the kind of house they might use as an illustration in a book on modern architecture to show how far we have come. But Louisa May Alcott would have loved it, and so did we

Goggle's first act after we moved to Cliffside was to buy a man-sized bicycle, his old bicycle having suddenly revealed itself for what it was, a child's toy. Hearing of this emergency in a rather direct way, his grandmother sent him a cheque for fifty dollars Goggle, with the help of his new friend, Tory Cummings, immediately began his research for this momentous purchase.

Tory, the son of our new neighbours, had freckles like ginger-snaps, a fright-wig of sandy hair, a grating, scornful voice, and large, flapping feet which came down in sections, so that instead of going thump, thump when he ran up on the porch Tory went thump-splat, thump-splat He immediately established a beach-head at our house, but he made no attempt to disguise his contempt for our parsimonious ways. "Whaddya know," he would say, throwing open the ice-box door. "Nothin' to eat but a lot of crummy old left-overs."

With a makeshift ration of whatever could be found, Goggle and Tory would sprawl on their stomachs on the floor with the Sears, Roebuck catalogue between them, poring over descriptions of bicycles and their accessories. I pointed out, rather unimaginatively, that it was possible to go to a shop in the larger town not five miles away and simply buy a bicycle. I had seen the bicycles there with my own eyes, waiting to be carried away by lucky boys with fifty-dollar cheques.

"One of those old bicycles that other guys go in and *handle!*" Goggle said with horror.

"And besides," Tory said, pausing to swallow a poultice of cold beef and cheese laced with maple syrup and ketchup, "the crummy way they make things these days how do you know what you're gettin'? Ya fill

out these forms, see, and ya got some guarantee. Ya got 'em by the short hair."

"Okay," I said.

"You want two fringed Western-style saddle-bags like I got!" Tory said to Goggle.

Or: "Reflectors!" the oracle would cry. "Ya mean your old man's too cheap to buy ya a headlight-tail-light generator outfit?"

And so it went, through de luxe chromium-plated chain guards, seat covers with tool kits, running lights, balloon saddles, two-position head-bracket speedometers, down to that marvel of the ages, the Blix horn, which emitted an intolerable screech, guaranteed, with a stealthy approach from behind, to make any little girl go off her head.

In due course the wonderful machine arrived, crated like the Trojan horse. It was lugged home from the express office, uncrated and oiled, and every screw was tightened, and every part caressed, and finally its handle-bars were decorated with a red plastic canary with a spun-glass tail, purchased for thirty-five cents from the heedless merchant who let the bicycles sit out in the shop to be handled by other guys.

Then, in bright spring days fragrant with the scent of flowering fruit trees, Goggle and Tory set out to explore the world. Tory wore a top-hat with a pheasant feather stuck in the band, and Goggle wore an old campaign hat from the Spanish-American War, which he had found on the town dump They brought back reports. Soon we learned who lived in every house, and whether they were nice, or whether they were "tools."

And then Goggle met Wally, and for a while all other pals were abandoned Wally was one of the people known to anthropologists as "Jackson Whites." He lived in the wooded hills behind us where his people had lived for generations, withdrawn from the modern world, preserving their own primitive way of life, like the mountain people of Kentucky and North Carolina. They seldom left their hidden houses, and repelled all curious investigators with a shotgun, and we never did find out how Goggle and Wally met. But, come to think of it, how do any boys get acquainted? However it had come about, Wally was the hero of our summer. We caught an occasional glimpse of him, as he came into our garden to pick up Goggle, riding an old bicycle held together with friction tape, looking like some shy denizen of the woods

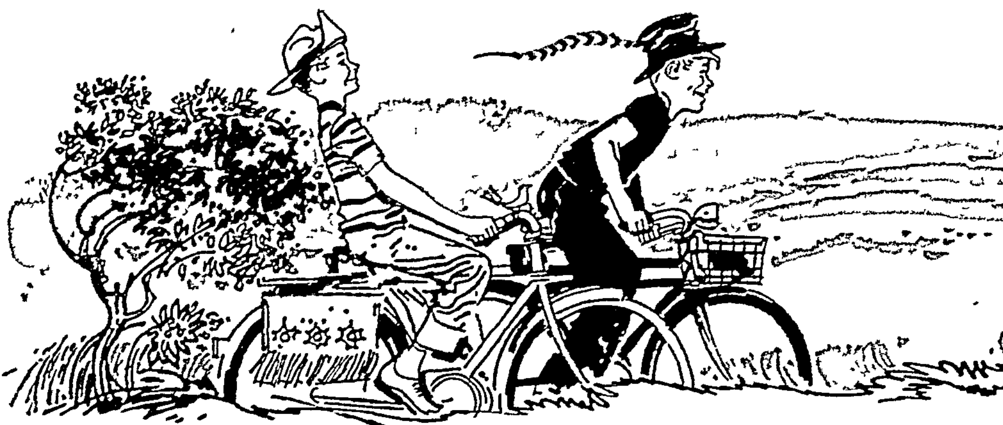
But mostly we just heard about him. The young Abraham Lincoln must have been rather like Wally, or perhaps he could have been if he had tried harder.

Wally could ride a horse, and shoot a gun, and swim, and fish, and forecast the weather, and build a lean-to of saplings in fifteen minutes, and tell time by looking at the sun, and identify any bird or beast by its call or its footprint, and name the constellations, and cook, and do taxidermy, and whittle, and climb trees, and set broken bones, and wrestle, and build fires out of wet wood, and find his way in the woods without a compass, and walk without making any noise, and dress animal skins, and clean fish, and cure man or beast of snake bite. When he had a toothache, he just took a pair of pliers and pulled the tooth out.

He was a lean, healthy, soft-spoken boy with a thatch of straw-coloured hair, and candid blue eyes, trusting, like a deer that has never heard a hunter's gun. We were proud of Goggle for liking him. A mild word. Goggle would have died for him. But since he wasn't asked to do this, the next best thing was to try to be Wally. Goggle worked so hard at this that in time he succeeded. You could tell just by looking at him that he was walking round inside Wally's skin, looking out of it from Wally's eyes.



Wally slept better in the open air, as any man worth his salt does, and once in a while he took to the woods to get away from the soft living of his parents' cabin Goggle went with him on one of these returns to nature. A slight bow was made to Goggle's soggy, self-indulgent background, and he was permitted to contribute a few luxuries for the overnight trip—bacon and eggs, butter, several tins of beans, a tin of Spam, a loaf of bread, and a half-pound bar of



chocolate for quick energy between meals. The trip went fine, and in the morning, Goggle reported, they had breakfasted on fried cardinal. "Fried cardinal!" Kate said, shocked. "Nobody shoots cardinals They aren't game birds!"

"You shoulda seen this cardinal," Goggle said.

"But what did you do with all that food you took along?" I asked.

"As soon as we got over the hill we ate it," Goggle explained "It was easier than carrying it."

AND THEN, I regret to say, Wally disappeared from our lives. As so often happens with friendships among men, a woman came between Goggle and Wally. She was the new girl in town, Alice Burton.

Actually there were very few moments from the time he had given up baby food when Goggle was not in love. Yet I never learned to recognize an approaching seizure, and the Alice affair was far advanced before I knew anything about it. The symptoms of Goggle in love, like the symptoms of the common cold, could be confused with many other conditions. But I suppose I should have been warned when he came into the living-room late one afternoon and stamped about restlessly, while pictures trembled on the walls and a cracked ash-tray fell apart on the coffee table.

"How did the day go?" I asked.

Goggle looked at me blankly. "Huh?" he said

"What happened today?" I said. "What did you do?"

Goggle didn't hear me. He had begun to circle the room in a vague,



tormented way, stumbling over chairs, picking at loose ends of wallpaper, and whistling through his teeth in an irritating manner, which I had asked him ten thousand times, more or less, not to do.

"As long as you are on your feet would you hand me the evening paper from the table," I asked him.

"What?" he said blankly.

"The evening paper," I said patiently.

"What about it?"

"Would you please hand it to me?"

"Well, why didn't you say so in the first place?" he demanded "All this beating about the bush."

"Dinner won't be for half an hour or so," I said. "Why don't you go outside and break a few windows or something?"

"Ha!" Goggle said "When I'm out you call me in. When I'm in you throw me out. A man can't do anything in his own house."

"I know," I said. "Things are tough all over."

Goggle strode out of the room and when he went out of the front door the doorknob fell off on the hall floor. He had been making it burglar-proof in some jazzy new way he had read about in *Popular Mechanics*.

I had just opened the paper, twitching, when Kate came in "He's crazy about that Alice," she said gloomily "She telephones him constantly, and I can hear her asinine giggle two rooms away."

"That explains it," I said. "I can't say that I blame Goggle. She seems like a nice little girl."

"Nice little girls do not ride on handle-bars," Kate said. "Especially while wearing such tight blue jeans."

"Is there any chance they may run away and get married, or anything?" I asked hopefully.

"I don't know about the running away," Kate said. "It's the anything I'm worried about." She turned and went back to the kitchen.

Uneasily, I reflected about the vitamin-enriched adolescents springing up all round us like weeds Alice was a petite little thing, chubby, and shaped like an egg. She had yellow hair which she wore long, down to her shoulders, and it was such an awful nuisance, you know, that she had to keep tossing it back all the time, like this, with her hand. She giggled and fluttered her eyelashes She even flirted with me, looking at me out of the corners of her eyes, crinkling them, her glance saying, we aren't playing for keeps, you know, old man. I consoled myself by remembering that in some cultures little girls were abandoned on mountain-tops.

Alice thought that boys were much more interesting than girls. The boys found Alice interesting in turn, and all the girls loathed her. I asked one of her contemporaries, Ann, why she didn't like Alice. (Parents are awful during this period. They stoop to anything to get information) Ann said Alice was "corny "

"What do you mean, 'corny'?" I asked

"She puts paint on her toe-nails," Ann said.

I knew from that moment that Goggle was a goner.

Alice rode on the handle-bars of Goggle's bicycle because she always had a flat tyre on her own. "It could be repaired, you know," I said to Goggle, one day after he had taken Alice home, her little blue-jeaned bottom bulging over the handle-bars.

Goggle shook his head. "That tyre's got an awful big hole," he said "I think she needs a new one "

"Well, why doesn't she get a new tyre?" I asked.

"It's a special make," Goggle said. "You have to send away for it and she's afraid to tell her father."

"Shall I tell him?" I said.

"Oh, that'd be worse," Goggle said hastily.

Alice called on the telephone to make secret trysts, hanging up if Kate or I answered. We learned to flatten ourselves against the wall when the



telephone rang, to avoid injury as Goggle sped to take the calls. Alice gave Goggle a picture of herself, which he carried in his wallet, with his Confederate dollar and his membership card in the Junior Magicians of America. Sometimes they walked together, presumably to rest Alice's bottom from the handle-bars, and when they walked they held hands, and whenever Goggle said anything at all Alice giggled and tossed her head and threw her hair back. Goggle was reduced to a state of idiocy. Away from Alice he looked rather like a sleep-walker, and he munched his way moodily through about five hundred dollars' worth of groceries between meals

His LIFE was complicated by another factor. He wanted an air-gun. It embarrassed him, now that he was a man who would be thirteen next year, to have nothing to depend on in case of emergency but a repeater cap gun. But I didn't want him to have an air-gun.

The house was full of cap pistols They fell out of clothes cupboards, tripped you up in the dark, hid under sofa cushions to bruise the

posterior, and arrived by mail in exchange for the box tops of breakfast foods. They were carried in fringed, heavily decorated holsters, usually one on each hip, or at that place where the hip will be when the boy is grown, and sometimes a vicious-looking spare gun was stuck into the belt. Tight-lipped gunmen lurked in our garden, crouching in the privet or fighting their way out of the lilacs, and when they fired the caps they also made a banging noise with their mouths.

They pointed these guns directly at one another, and my argument was that they might forget and point an air-gun also. Goggle would have to wait awhile before he was ready for a gun which shot a projectile.

"No" is a word little boys do not accept. "Please!" Goggle would plead. "I promise not to point it at anybody! I promise not to load it until I use it! I promise to carry it pointed down!"

When pleading failed, scorn came. "Everybody else has an air-gun. Andy's father says every guy *ought* to have an air-gun. All the other guys just think you're too cheap to buy me an air-gun!"

Threats came after scorn.

"If you don't buy me an air-gun I'll run away from home!"

"Why don't you?" I said. "I can't pay the grocery bill anyway."

"Ha!" Goggle said. "I know you. You'd call the cops!"

"Try me," I said.

Pushed into a corner, Goggle went upstairs and got his Boy Scout canteen and filled it at the kitchen sink, running the water slowly so he wouldn't fail to hear me when I protested, and when I failed to protest he suddenly remembered that he couldn't run away that night because he had promised Ma he would take a bath.

For me this was a heady triumph of will. There are few things more difficult than sitting quietly while a boy fills a canteen to take with him when he runs away from home Vigilance is the price of freedom, I kept reminding myself, and I was always prepared at a moment's notice to say, "No, you can't have an air-gun," when wakened at dawn on Sunday, or stalked in the bathroom while shaving, or interrupted while reading.

In the end, Goggle sabotaged me. He came in one afternoon reverently carrying an old air-gun. It had belonged to Andy Marsh, the boy whose father said every boy *ought* to have one "Andy got a twenty-two," Goggle said. "He says I can have his old air-gun for a dollar."

I hesitated I was still brooding about Alice, and wondering how we could get that bicycle tyre mended. Maybe if Goggle had an air-gun he would forget about Alice.

So I fell. Like hundreds of witless parents everywhere, weakened by persistence, undone by love and my own nutty reasoning, I gave in. I took a dollar from my wallet and handed it to Goggle. Afterwards, when I needed whatever compensations I could find, I remembered the look on his face as he ran outside to join the company of his peers in the field.

Two incidents followed in sequence. The first event was Goggle's discovery that Alice had also given her picture to Andy Marsh, who not only had a twenty-two but could stand on his head for five minutes and drink a glass of water at the same time.

"Poor Goggle," I said, when I saw Kate burning the contents of Goggle's waste-paper basket, including the torn scraps of Alice's picture.

"The poor Marshes," we said together, looking at each other and laughing.

The second incident was the shooting out of some panes of glass in the house Miss Kane was building. It happened on the Fourth of July. I had wanted Goggle to be with us on the village Common that morning because there was to be a celebration, with the Legion Post rifle and drum corps, and a band, and a few words from one of our local citizens. As Mark Twain felt about his father, I feel about formal ceremonies they seem more intelligent as one grows older. I had wanted the three of us to stand and breathe the free air of the Fourth of July together, with our neighbours, on the Common. Goggle failed to show up, and I was sore.

He had been allowed to spend the night before with friend Tory and when boys spend the night together it has nothing to do with sleeping. They giggle and talk and climb out on the roof. They build railway bridges with the Erector set, they go downstairs to eat cold peas from the ice-box, or scoop the icing off the chocolate cake. When they fall into exhausted slumber at last they generally do not waken until noon the next day.

I assumed this was what had happened on the Fourth of July Goggle wheeled guiltily into our garden long after the celebration was over. He was steering the bicycle with one hand and making a great show of pointing his air-gun at the ground in the proper way. I was on my knees

killing crab grass and I didn't speak to him because I was disappointed that he hadn't come and yet I thought it was a little absurd to be disappointed. Goggle would have to learn about freedom and the Fourth of July in his own way, and I didn't particularly want to think about what that might mean.

Later that afternoon Mrs. Boothe, one of our neighbours, came to call. She was a kind woman, and Kate was fond of her. Today she was distressed, and over the tea-cups she told Kate the terrible news about Miss Kane's doors.

Miss Kane was a professional woman well known in her particular field in New York. That she had chosen to build a house in our village was a source of pride and pleasure to everyone. She had hired an excellent architect, and together they were constructing a beautiful small house on an isolated bluff over the river.

A feature of the house was a magnificent set of four old French doors, of baroque design set with lead glass, which had been taken from a house recently dismantled. These doors had been set up temporarily against the frame of the drawing-room, and on the morning of the Fourth of July someone had entertained himself by shooting a hole in the centre of each pane.

"I think it must have been a boy," Mrs Boothe said. "But Miss Kane thinks a boy old enough to have a gun wouldn't be capable of such destruction She thinks it may have been done by someone who doesn't wish her to build her house here. A malicious act. It was done this morning, when everyone was on the Common. She has stopped all work on the house, and the property is to be posted by the State Police It's a terrible shadow on the whole village."

Kate said afterwards that her heart sank. She thought of Goggle, and she was so appalled she couldn't say anything.

"Mrs. Locke is telling everyone that Andy Marsh did it," Mrs. Boothe went on "But Andy says he didn't do it, and his father says that Andy's word is always good, no matter what rascally thing he does."

At this moment Kate realized that Goggle was standing out in the hall, listening She saw him from the corner of her eye

"Really," Mrs. Boothe went on, "it is just about the most terrible thing that has ever happened in our village. We thought it was bad when the Pike boy rolled a steam-roller down the hill into the river, and

Mr. Patton was very upset when the young people pushed all the hay out of his loft on Hallow-e'en, but we've never had anything like this. We've never had the State Police brought in. Miss Kane says the glass is irreplaceable It isn't made any more."

Kate saw Goggle move. "Dear," she said, "have you heard the terrible news about Miss Kane's doors? Do you know who might have shot out the glass?"

Goggle spoke in a small voice. "No, I don't," he said.

Kate was tremendously relieved. Goggle's word, like Andy's, had always been good.

Yet in the next few days we began to worry about Goggle He seemed listless and depressed. He stayed in his room with his wheels, nuts, bolts, springs and the bells that rang, yet these delights had lost their power to charm. He just sat there, pale and brooding. If Tory telephoned, Goggle said he was busy. His bicycle leaned idly against the back door. His catcher's mitt mouldered in a corner, with the air-gun.

I assumed that Alice was at the bottom of this. "There are other fish in the sea," I said to him one night as I turned off the light in his bedroom. "Pick out another girl. Show her you don't care."

"Huh?" Goggle said

His bewilderment sounded genuine. "I mean Alice," I said. "You aren't thinking about her, are you?"

"Heck, *no*," Goggle said. "That jerk."

So then I began to be concerned. Maybe he was actually ill. It was the polio season, after all. I turned the light on again. "Do you feel all right?" I asked.

"I guess so," Goggle said, in a tone which did nothing to allay my fears.

I felt his forehead. He didn't seem to have a temperature. "Does your neck ache?" It is a question you ask after taking a deep breath, so your voice won't shake.

"No," Goggle said.

I went downstairs, troubled. "Maybe we ought to call the doctor tomorrow," I said to Kate.

She looked at me. There are times in marriage when you feel so involved with each other that it's almost as if you have only one brain between the two of you. Excess words are unnecessary.

"He's got something on his mind," Kate said. "I don't think he is physically ill. He said something very odd to me today. He asked me where Sing Sing was. When I asked why he wanted to know he walked away muttering that he might have to go there some day."

I refrained from saying that this possibility had always seemed a likely one to me. For the moment I was more concerned about Goggle's health. "There's nothing to lose by calling the doctor," I said.

"I'll call him in the morning," Kate said.

As it turned out, we didn't have time to call the doctor, because in the morning the State Police arrived, in the person of Officer Kelly, polished boots and all. He walked up on the porch while we were having breakfast, and rang the bell, and said he wanted to see our boy. We stood at the door, united in peril, with Goggle between us.

Officer Kelly pushed the hat back from his ruddy, worldly, tolerant face. He scratched his forehead and looked at Goggle. "You shot out that glass, didn't you, boy?" he said.

We could hear Goggle catch his breath, but when he spoke his small, frightened voice was filled with tremendous relief. "Yes, sir," he said.

Goggle hadn't cried for a long time, but he cried when Officer Kelly left—great, tearing, animal sounds that broke your heart Kate held him and I held them both

"Why did you do it?" I asked.

"For *fun!*" Goggle said, sobbing. "They just seemed like a lot of old thrown-out windows to me!"

"But why didn't you tell the truth?" Kate asked sorrowfully. "You've never lied before"

"I was too scared," Goggle said, his body shaking. "Everybody said it was so terrible, and you couldn't buy the glass, and the cops were going to put the guy in jail . . ."

"All right," Kate said. "All right." She was holding him and rocking him, a spectacle which might have been funny under any other circumstances, with Goggle about the size of a young steer. "We love you," she said. "We'll help you redeem yourself We'll all help."

And with the terrible news out in the open, suddenly everything began to arrange itself in proportions to be coped with. Faced with the young criminal, Miss Kane could only sigh with relief. "Of course you can work for me," she said "I'll tell the police that you and I will settle this



thing between ourselves. We'll start work on the house again tomorrow. We can get some kind of glass to put back in those doors, and you can haul stones for the terrace."

Miss Kane couldn't have chosen a better assignment for a man too young to go to jail and break rocks to pay his debt to society.

And there was the important lesson Kate and I learned from the episode. Even when they try to get out of things, little boys long for justice. To have shot out the glass was wrong, but to have behaved like a coward was a much heavier burden for Goggle to carry. He had thrown his self-respect away in his fear, and now he was sweating to find it somewhere under those heavy stones on Miss Kane's land.

In the country you couldn't say, "Who, me?" In the country everything was out in the open. There were no holes in the pavement to pop into, no narrow buildings to disappear between. "Who, me?" wasn't a lie exactly. It was an evasion, and you could often get away with it in the city where things were so complicated that often the trouble would blow over before cause and effect could be joined. But in the country you had to take the consequences like a man, and not let the blame fall on somebody else. There are some parts of Miss Kane's terrace which may last for ever.

While Goggle was working on his rock pile, neighbours began to drop in on us unexpectedly, even neighbours we didn't know very well If Goggle wasn't there, they made it a point to come back when he was. The gentle Mrs. Worthing, for instance, told Goggle that she had once broken a church window when she had been made to stay at home from the Sunday-school picnic. A rather righteous neighbour had reported it. "I didn't have to haul rocks," Mrs. Worthing said to Goggle, "but you have no idea how many weeds can grow in one church lawn."

And Tom Mitchell, a member of the board of directors of our local bank, had once soaped the railway tracks and brought a heavy goods train to a stop and tied up rail traffic for hours. "I *never* got up my courage to say that I did it," he told Goggle. "A man can spend an awful lot of time in later years trying to make up for something like that"

And as for Andy Marsh, it was such a pleasure for him to be the unjustly accused for a change, the wronged innocent, publicly cleared, that even he came to see Goggle. "I didn't squeal on you," he said. "I just told the cops there were other guys in this town who had guns."

Then he said his dad wanted to know if Goggle wouldn't like to come over and practise on the rifle-range they had set up in the woods behind their house. The boys could take turns with the twenty-two.

Goggle came into my study to see me about that, carrying the air-gun. "I don't suppose you'll want me to go," he said sadly. "And here's the air-gun. You give it back to me when I'm ready for it."

I wished I knew how to say the things that were in my mind. "I was too cowardly to keep on saying no when you wanted the air-gun," I said "But I should have made some plan for you to learn how to use a gun, even if I don't know much about it myself You go on over with Andy, and tell Mr. Marsh thanks for me."

Goggle went out, happily. We had found our home among nice people, imperfect people, like ourselves.

IN THE AUTUMN Goggle went off to the village school with the boys and girls he already knew, accomplices in many a spring and summer escapade. They went with transparent protests of reluctance.

The early autumn days had been sweet, with smoky, still air, and a sense of timeless, aimless freedom. Goggle and Tory had gone off on their bicycles, rising on the pedals to gain speed as they went down the driveway, covered with dust and autumn glory; off to spear frogs, or to search the dump for treasure, or just to look for adventure. But they had just about exhausted all the possibilities Even their big business venture, the G and T Cap Gun Sales Company, had failed, and the tree-house sales office in the big oak by the barn stood abandoned and desolate in the falling leaves.

The G and T Cap Gun Sales Company, a merger of those two tycoons, Goggle and Tory, had been formed for the purpose of unloading their toy guns, now of interest only to "little kids." Partnership papers were drawn up and filed away in the executive office of the company, located in Goggle's bedroom. The executive office was connected to the showroom in the tree house by a two-way telephone system, which never really functioned properly. "One, two, three, testing," Tory would say, in the tree house. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes," Goggle would say, in his bedroom, "but not on the phone."

If customers presented themselves whose credit was doubtful, or whose custom was undesirable, they were repelled from the tree house by bean-

shooters. A particularly persistent undesirable was Tommy Cummings, called Ugly, Tory's younger brother. Ugly was convinced that part of his own private stock had found its way into the showroom, pirated by the partners. Standing under the oak tree, his small, passionate face dented by small white beans from above, he would call down malediction on both partners. "Pa'll baste ya," he would say. "He'll beat ya to a pulp. And I'll poison ya. Your toes'll curl up and turn black and fall off. I got it right there in my chemical set. Your hair'll fall out and so will your teeth. It's like radium. Your eyeballs'll turn to jelly, and your guts'll rot and turn green, and you'll scream in agony."

"Aaaa, shaddup!" Tory said. "Get lost, d'ya hear me? Get lost!"

When Ugly decided to attack the base of the immemorial oak with his Boy Scout axe, steps had to be taken. A demand inventory of the stock of the company was held, and Ugly marched off in triumph with two repeating six-shooters and a holster on a belt studded with green glass.

"We woulda given'm the cash!" the partners protested in tones of affronted honour. "We were just doin'm a favour!"

"Well, do me a favour," I said. "Get lost, d'ya hear me? Get lost!"

Obviously it was time for school to begin.

Getting Goggle off to school in the morning was an operation comparable to getting Hannibal across the Alps. Kate at that time was putting into effect a theory of child training which she had learned from an old, exhausted friend. The theory was that if a child's room was left untouched, if you never picked anything up or nagged him to, in time he would become so disgusted by the disorder that he would clean it up himself and thus learn self-discipline cleanly and bravely from within. But after several months of this experiment only a bulldozer could have cleared Goggle's room. Socks were lost, schoolbooks were swallowed up, clothes were outgrown where they lay, and mildew advanced relentlessly from the corners.

To wake Goggle it was necessary to take a deep breath, stride in firmly, ignoring the splintering, crunching noises underfoot, feel around in the debris on the bed until a foot or an arm was located, and then pull, closing your ears against the heart-rending groans. It was best to go back downstairs then, where you could bully him from below while he assembled a costume from the rummage sale in which he lived. When he came down we overlooked minor flaws such as broken shoelaces,

unmatched socks, trousers out at the knee, and restricted our inspection to essentials, seeing that the fly was closed, the teeth relatively clean, and dirt scraped from behind the ears. He then had three and a half minutes left in which to assemble unfinished homework ("Who stole my spelling!") and gobble breakfast; and in the midst of this Tory might be espied whirling past on his bicycle, and Goggle, jumping up in a spray of Rice Krispies and homogenized milk, would dash out shrieking, "Wait up! Wait up!" Silence descended on us then and Kate and I would feel wonderful, knowing that there was no enemy territory for Goggle to cross, no long shadows cast by city buildings.

Experience had taught us to stay away from the school until summoned, but on Parents' Day we marched off dutifully to our local citadel of national virtue, its windows blooming with pumpkins and black cats, its halls decorated with flags, and a model, on a table, of the Parthenon at Athens, made out of flour-and-water paste and toilet-paper rolls.

We sat through A Programme while an assortment of small, agonized wretches contorted themselves through recitations, concluding with a Tableau of Nations. "I am Holland," a plump, apparently drugged eight-year-old female told us, her dilated eyes black with terror. "I bring you pretty tulips to cheer your hearts." When Holland turned, her wooden shoes decided not to turn with her and she fell flat on her face, and was led away, sobbing, by Greece, in a draped bedsheet, and Scotland, whose kilt caught on the curtain and was abandoned while Scotland fled in his pants. As usual, Goggle took no part in any of these exhibits but sat at the back of the room, flanked by Tory and Andy Marsh, who pinched him and punched him when Mr. Norris wasn't looking. Mr. Norris was Goggle's first man teacher, and at the end of the Tableau we attended his class in science.

"Who can name for me the properties of alcohol?" Mr. Norris asked in a low voice of a good teacher, pitched just below disaster.

"Alcohol paralyses the will, weakens the conscience and destroys the character," a little girl with yellow curls informed us.

Mr. Norris swallowed hard and avoided looking at us, where we sat at our little desks in the back row, with our knees pressed up against our bosoms.

"I mean the physical properties of alcohol," he said, in his desperately gentle voice. "How about you, Goggle?"

Our hearts sank as Goggle rose. "Alcohol is . . ." he said. "Alcohol, ah . . ." and then he fell into a reverie and chewed at a desiccated wart on his thumb.

Some good trade, I thought, closing my eyes Plumbing, say, or bricklaying. They make a lot of money, and it is useful work.

"Alcohol is, ah . . . well, it burns, doesn't it?" Goggle asked dreamily

"Thank you, Goggle," Mr. Norris said, wiping his forehead.

A fireman, I decided. Any boy who was clever enough to know that alcohol burns would certainly be way out in front when it came to being a fireman.

We stayed after class to speak to Mr. Norris. It would take us a few years more to learn to recognize the characteristics of a good teacher for boys, but Mr. Norris had all of them. "Goggle's a good boy," he said. "Some boys just can't go wrong." He flashed a quick, surprising grin. "Some boys are just too darned stubborn to go wrong."

What Mr. Norris did for Goggle was to make him a Safety Patrolman, with an arm band and a white Sam Browne belt, a responsibility so solemn that his face was cast in a perpetual frown of exasperated authority. "Those little kids," he would say when he got home. "Every single one of them would get their heads bumped if I didn't keep 'em moving." And still wearing his arm band, which expanded when he flexed his mighty muscle, he would pour himself a glass of milk and sit down at the kitchen table to refresh himself, with many a gusty sigh and burp, Officer Jones, off duty from the federal pen. (A policeman, I thought. They have retirement plans and pensions.)

Once a week Kate went to the school to help cook and serve lunch. It was from her vantage point behind the steam table that she saw the love affair develop between Goggle and Jeanie Benson, the romance which ultimately broke our hearts.

Jeanie Benson was a pretty little girl, with soft, dark hair and a direct, rather impudent way of looking at you. But more than beauty, Jeanie had courage. She was a victim of polio. She wore braces on her legs, and she walked to school from her house one block away on crutches, and I don't suppose anything ever astonished us so much, or touched us so much, as to discover that Goggle had fallen in love with her.

Jeanie would wait until the patrol had herded all the little children from the primary grades across the road, and then with her shining

face and her shining crutches she made her entrance into the lunch-room, solemnly escorted by Officer Goggle, resplendent in his Sam Browne belt and arm band. She took her place at a lunch table, surrounded by her friends, and Officer Goggle, impassive and grim, brought her a toasted cheese sandwich and cocoa.



Jeanie's secret was that she knew how to laugh at her predicament. Everything amused her: her difficulty with walking, the troublesome knee-locks on her braces, which sometimes did not unlock when she sat down, so that her legs stuck straight out in front of her like the legs of a wooden doll, and reduced her and everyone round her to hysteria. She laughed at her awkwardness in getting up or down stairs, and, when she became exhausted and had to stop, a little, intimate world sprang into being round her. She possessed that wonderful faculty of making everything entertaining.

After school she walked home in a circle of chattering friends, with Officer Goggle at her side, carrying her books, and there she held court from a sofa in her room upstairs, which had been furnished as a sitting-room, with books and games and a record player. The laughter and the music would drift downstairs so that you could hear it at the front door, as we learned when we were forced to go over to the Bensons' and drag Goggle home.

We didn't like to do this, but Goggle did have to eat and sleep and finish his homework. Also at this time he was receiving twenty-five cents a week for the performance of certain chores, such as emptying the cat box, but the suffering this indignity brought to his fastidious soul was so great that it was often easier and less revolting to do it ourselves.

When he was brought home, his first act was to go upstairs and telephone Jeanie to say that he had arrived home, after a journey of two minutes. He could see the light in Jeanie's bedroom as he talked to her on the telephone, and later at night I would sometimes find him up there standing at the window, waiting for her light to be turned out.

Early in December he asked me if I would help him pick out a Christmas present for her. From his allowance he had saved, by the practice of extreme self-denial at the sweet shop, the magnificent sum of seventy-five cents. He wanted to spend it well. "No junky stuff," he said "I want to get her something real jazzy."

We went to Woolworth's, and from a bewildering assortment of glittering objects Goggle selected a bracelet of gold, with a pendant heart locket wherein to keep his picture. By Christmas Eve the bracelet was almost worn out from being looked at.

The morning dawned bright and cold, with a scatter of snow in the air like sequins, and Kate and I sat in the kitchen over coffee, waiting until Goggle took the bracelet to Jeanie, the only Christmas he had ever postponed the opening of his gifts. He was back, surprisingly, in a matter of moments. His feet were heavy and reluctant on the porch and through the house, and he came to the kitchen and faced us silently, his face white with shock. Then the story came out. Jeanie had seen him coming as he ran up the steps of the Benson house. She was downstairs in her dressing-gown, on the sofa, unwrapping her presents. Her father had carried her downstairs, and when she saw Goggle she forgot she wasn't wearing her braces. She stood up impulsively, and took a step towards him, and then she fell—and broke her leg.

Some sorrows are beyond words or tears. I don't think any of us remember what we got for Christmas that year. The ambulance took Jeanie to the hospital, where her leg was X-rayed and set The next day she would go to a polio institute, far away, where she would have re-education in walking. It might take a year.

We went to the hospital in the late afternoon, driving with sad faces

through streets alight with Christmas trees and past houses where laughter and gaiety spilled out of suddenly opened doors At the hospital we were told that no children under fourteen were allowed in the rooms as visitors But the mature, brisk woman at the reception desk was not as impersonal as she seemed to be. When I said that the young man beside me was a friend of Miss Benson she heard the intonation in my voice, and she said, "Follow me," and took us to Jeanie's room.

Jeanie was propped up in bed with her leg suspended in its cast. Her hair was tied back with a red ribbon, and there was a sprig of holly pinned to her flowered bed jacket. If she was in pain she did not show it, but she did not smile. She was impassive, as if she wore her face like a mask over some deep acceptance of despair. Kate and I walked up and down the hall while Goggle was with Jeanie. When he came out, and we looked in to say good-bye, we did not speak. Jeanie lay with her hands open, palms upward, on the bedspread, and her face turned to the wall.

Later that evening, as we sat round the fire, reading aloud in an effort to distract ourselves, our minister, Dr Furness, called, making his Christmas rounds. We liked Dr. Furness very much because he was a simple, dedicated man of God, but sometimes, unfortunately, he felt that it was his duty to try to express the inexpressible "Thank you for going to see Jeanie," he said to Goggle Goggle thrust his fists into his trouser-pockets and silently turned his back.

"That wasn't very polite," I said gently, after the minister had gone.

Goggle turned to me fiercely. "Why should he thank me?" he said. "He doesn't even know the score!" Seeing his face, I took a step towards him, quickly, and he pressed his head against my chest, hard Through my shirt I could feel his face, hot with unshed tears.

After that Goggle took apart everything in sight, including the electric mixer, his bicycle, and various carburettors and clocks. Our repair bills were rather high at this time. Any article which could not be put back together again was, of course, incorrectly put together in the first place by dopes who didn't know what the heck they were doing.

We didn't complain, for our hearts ached, and we longed for some diversion for poor Goggle. The diversion, when it came, was a surprise to all of us I was given a writing assignment which would take us to Mexico City for a year.

On the way to Mexico, Goggle read books, stretched out on the back seat of our car. He refused to look out of the window at the scenery when we called it to his attention, and once across the border he endured, under protest, endless native markets filled with straw hats and pottery, and jolting rides over impassable roads to see battered baroque-style churches. ("Oh, no, not another broke church!" was the way he put it.)

In Mexico City we found a small hotel and after Goggle had gone to bed that first night, having elicited a promise from me to find him a hamburger the next day, or a hot dog, or some decent food a man could eat, Kate and I sat rather gloomily in our room, feeling homesick, and wondering if we should turn round and go back to Cliffside.

But Goggle was enrolled in the English-speaking Anglo School, and next morning we set out to find it. I don't know quite what we had expected. Adobe walls, maybe, Spanish moss, iron-barred windows and the sound of guitars. What we found might have been transported intact from White Plains, New York, or Toledo, Ohio. A new, enormous, factory-like building of brick, with steel casement windows, set in a flat green lawn with signs saying, "Please Keep Off the Grass." We were welcomed by the principal, Mr. Peters, a young American expatriate, gravely polite, efficient and busy. "We will just throw him in and find out how he swims," Mr. Peters said briskly. Miserably we watched while Goggle was led away to a classroom. He looked pale and grim.

We drove away silently. I had never felt such a flop as a father. What had I done to my child, I asked myself. Why had I brought him to Mexico? He didn't even like tortillas. Would he ever get his hamburger? Would he survive?

We had to dismiss these considerations for the moment, since we had an appointment in town with a house agent, and as a result of this we moved into the Casa José, a small house with a view of two volcanoes

The students at the Anglo School numbered more than a thousand, and they all, boys and girls alike, wore dungarees and T-shirts and casuals, and looked exactly like their counterparts north of the border, who are often shown in photographs captioned, "What Can Be Done About Our Juvenile Delinquents?" But these juvenile delinquents spoke two languages and, as usual with teen-age children, this accomplishment became the badge of belonging, the way of demonstrating that one

was not just an unspeakable little green jerk, a *tourist*, like our Goggle.

Fifty per cent of the students at the Anglo School were Mexican children, but they were not quaint Mexican children in straw hats and serapes. In Mexico City there are said to be five hundred millionaires, and it was their children who came to the Anglo School, in Cadillacs. They lolled on the lawn, ignoring the signs, giggling in two languages and stuffing themselves with chocolate bars. Into this gay musical comedy Goggle disappeared every day, looking slightly green round the edges. But in a few days he began to relax and throw his weight about again, always a good sign. For example, he was letting his hair grow longer, to be jazzy in the Mexican style.

"It's simply revolting," Kate said. "I just won't stand for it."

"It's *my* hair," Goggle said.

"It is his hair," I said, "and when he has finished with it we can rent it out at Hallow-e'en."

"Or I can lend it to you," Goggle said pointedly, looking at my hairline.

Our exchange of insults was a happy pastime, baffling to Mama, which Goggle and I took more and more pleasure in, now that he was growing older. It generally signalled a free-for-all in which I grabbed him and turned him on his ear. Or tried to. I was learning to be cagey now and grab him when he was off balance. I also avoided being manœuvred into doing Indian grips, after Goggle threw me in our patio, jarring more than my lumbar vertebræ.

Goggle seemed to be taking another big step out on that taut, trembling line which crosses the chasm between boyhood and young manhood The evidence was the appearance of a hair-tonic bottle on his shelf in the bathroom It was a discarded hair-tonic bottle of mine, which now contained an emulsion, as I learned from Goggle, of rubbing alcohol, mineral oil, shaving lotion and an unidentifiable liquid which may have been the last of our sulphathiazole diarrhœa mixture. He would stand, dreamy and deaf, in front of the bathroom mirror, combing this special mixture through his baling-wire locks.

There were other signs of impending change, such as the slight fuzz apparent on his cheek when his head was turned towards the light, an unpredictable croak in the voice which all three of us knew enough to ignore and, last but not least, a complete inability to come to terms with

Mama. Mama wasn't even Mama any more. She was just "'She." ("She started it!" "She promised!" "She said I didn't hafta!")

With this push on Mama went a certain crowding of Papa. An excellent opportunity was provided when Goggle began to learn Spanish by ear, with that wonderful facility of the young which is the despair of the ageing I didn't know just how fluent Goggle had become until he was with me one day when I drove to the filling station. I asked for petrol, and to have the air in the tyres checked, and even made a comment on the weather, speaking Spanish, or so I thought. But when we drove away Goggle said to me coldly, "You addressed that man in the feminine form."

"Gad!" I said.

But a great, secret relief flared in my bosom, and on our next visit to the filling station I merely smiled dumbly, like Harpo Marx, and pointed to Goggle, and he took over. There is in every man's life a first time when he sees, in his son, his own mortality. As I sat silent, with Goggle in command of the situation, this was that moment. We both knew it. I could tell, from the slightly superior attitude of the back of his neck, that Goggle had taken his first bite out of his father.

I had tried to learn Spanish I honestly had. I had gone with Kate twice a week to the Anglo School for a private lesson with Señora Martinez, Goggle's teacher. Señora Martinez, who should have been standing on a balcony with a rose in her teeth, was actually a hazard to my learning Spanish. "Say ooooo . . . like this," she would say, bringing her lovely warm face and her rich, ripe lips close to mine, while Kate watched, rather speculatively, I thought. "Ooooo . . ." I would say, my head reeling. It got so I couldn't even speak English. But here was Goggle, already speaking something called "Spanglish," a variant of both languages employed by the students of the Anglo School to show that they belonged.

And just when Goggle was established in the inner circle, when it seemed that everything was going well, the whole structure began to crack at the seams. First we received a mimeographed manifesto from the school, printed in two languages, instructing us that, owing to the stealing which was so prevalent in the school, all locks on student lockers must be replaced by larger locks Unless parents complied at once, students would suffer reprisals, like being made to stay after school.

We were somewhat puzzled by this astonishing approach to dishonesty.

"They tried monitors in the halls," Goggle explained, "but it didn't work because they learned all the combinations."

Before I could do anything about this, another problem claimed our attention. Goggle came home from school one day waving a handful of pesos.

"You won't have to give me my allowance next week," he said, grandly.

"Where did you get that?" I asked.

"I won it," he said, "shooting dice on the football field."

I closed my eyes and swallowed. Then, with phenomenal control, I suggested mildly that it was customary to play football on football fields.

"I know," Goggle said. "But the other guys don't want to. They'd rather play pontoon or shoot dice."

I suggested that Goggle join the basket-ball players in the gym, on the grounds that stooping over a pair of dice might stunt his growth. But in a few days he came home triumphantly waving another fistful of pesos. It seemed that the syndicate had followed him to the gym, there to set up book on his facility at shooting baskets This was Goggle's cut.

At this time our English-speaking newspaper was filled with the scandals about the basket-ball syndicate in New York. I suppose I felt about Goggle just as I felt about the basket-ball teams As though somethink fine and uncomplicated and good was being dishonoured. All the things I hadn't wanted to face about the Anglo School came into focus. The stealing from school lockers, among the children of millionaires. Shooting dice on the football field. Gambling in the gym. Goggle was being ruined, and I told him in no uncertain terms what my feelings were about betting on a basket-ball court.

We ate our dinner that night in uneasy silence When Goggle kissed us good night before going to bed, I detected the rather startling and unpleasant smell of cigarettes, but since I had already produced gloom enough for one evening I tried not to make an issue of this. "I just hope cigarettes won't cut your wind," I said. "You'd be a disappointment to the syndicate if you fell flat on your face under the basket."

Goggle gave me a fast, light punch in the left kidney and darted away

saying, "Ha ha!" a signal which meant he wanted a reassuring rough-house before bed, but my heart wasn't in it.

THE YOUNG PEOPLE'S Square Dance Club was the answer of the American mothers to dice games on the football field. The Club would meet every Saturday night in the community-room of the Protestant Church, for refreshments, contributed by the mothers, and dancing.

I drove Goggle to the first dance. Most of the boys were there when we arrived, lounging outside the hall, spitting between their teeth. They hid their cigarettes when we drove up. "Wha'd'ya sayin'," they said listlessly to Goggle, in voices like rusty nutmeg graters. "Wha'd'ya know," Goggle replied, holding his breath to look more manly.

I went home and had dinner with Kate, and presently the telephone rang. It was her pal Mrs Clark The dance was over, and it had been an enormous success. Tommy Stone had fallen from the gallery and, while at first they had feared his leg was broken, they had just now heard from the hospital that it was only badly bent. Only three members of the club had been suspended for going outside without permission, and only two had been caught with cigarettes in the men's room. They were all on probation for the next dance. Everything taken into consideration, the Young People's Square Dance Club Committee could congratulate itself.

At that moment Goggle burst through the door, having found a ride home. His face was flushed and glowing. He looked, as his poor, badgered mother liked to say, good enough to eat with a spoon. Our strained faces cracked into smiles. "Wha'd'ya sayin'?" I asked.

"Oh, it was really jazzy," Goggle said.

What we didn't know for a few days was that the dance had been really jazzy for Goggle because of a girl named Sally. Her name was introduced one afternoon after school with elaborate casualness, between two faked yawns. "Can I ask Sally for lunch?" was what Goggle said

"Sally?" Kate asked.

"Sure," Goggle said impatiently. "You know, *Sally.*"

"Oh, yes," Kate said. "Of course. Sally. Tell me, does Sally have a mother I can telephone?"

"Why do you have to telephone her?" Goggle asked with alarm.

"To ask her if Sally can come to lunch."

"What's her mother got to do with it?" Goggle said.

At any rate, Sally's mother was duly called, and Sally appeared on Saturday for lunch, and any fool could plainly see, in the way she looked at Goggle, that she knew a lord of creation when she saw one.

She was a pretty, fragile-looking little girl, with fair short curls and a glowing skin. She was a drum majorette, and brought with her a gleaming chromium baton with a silk tassel at the end. When Goggle presented her to Kate, saying, in his most formal manner, "This is Ma," she curtsied, a sweet old-fashioned gesture which warmed Ma right down to her espadrilles.

We had lunch on the terrace under the trees, bathed in the painter's light, like a composition by Manet. The effect was heightened by Goggle's Latin look. He was now almost unrecognizable as Goggle of the Cliffside P.S. His skin was darkened by the sun, his long black hair glistened in waves, bathed in its private emulsion, starched with dust. There was a dark shadow on his upper lip, and two shadows on his cheeks where he was hopefully cultivating sideboards. His conversation had become frightfully cosmopolitan. For "Thank you," he now said "Much grass," which was Spanglish for *muchas gracias*. But at lunch he was too busy to talk, eating hot tortillas, which he now loved passionately. Melted butter and the juices of the *nopalito,* the young leaves of the cactus, ran down his arm. Sally had carried her baton with her to the table, and between courses she twirled it.

Dessert was a salad of fresh oranges and pineapple, which Goggle refused "No thank you," he said politely "I ate so much other junk my tonsils are floating."

We had been having trouble getting him to eat any fresh fruit. A sudden inspiration came to me. "Sally," I said, "why don't you see to it that Goggle eats his fruit?"

Instantly, with a shriek of alarm, Goggle sprang from his chair and climbed a mimosa tree. Sally, with an alacrity astonishing in a girl, climbed after him and brought him down. Goggle ate his fruit. Awe overcame me and luncheon ended on a very happy note.

A few days later, Goggle came home from school looking rather thoughtful. " Sally asked me to go on a mountain-climbing trip with her father on Sunday," he said, picking at the wart on his elbow. "That is, if I want to."

"Why wouldn't you want to?" Kate asked.

"Well, it's Sally's father's club, see," Goggle said, not looking at us. "They only speak German."

The three of us were silent for a moment. Mexico, we had learned, is one of the sanctuaries of the world for men not welcome in other lands.

"What does Sally's father do?" I asked.

Goggle looked at me, for the first time. "He was a Nazi soldier," he said. "An officer, or something."

"But I thought Sally was an American!" Kate exclaimed.

"Her mother is," Goggle said "When the war was over they got out of Germany and came to Mexico."

Again there was a pause "Her father asked me, too," Goggle said finally, "but Sally said I probably wouldn't want to come."

It seemed a rather pointed statement, pointed at me. But I couldn't rise to it. Was I supposed to jump with joy if a bunch of second-hand Supermen invited Goggle to find strength-through-joy in the mountains of Mexico? I got up to leave the room. But as I left, Kate spoke. Her voice was gentle. "I think it would be nice," she said, "if the sins of the fathers did not have to be visited on the children."

It was late the next night when Goggle got home. He was wind-burned and wonderfully tired, and his eyes looked as if they had seen marvels. They had climbed their mountain to the snow-line to survey the world, and afterwards they had come down a bit to eat their lunch in the sun and heavy mountain grass. "Here, Ma," Goggle said, turning his knapsack upside down and dumping its contents on the floor. "I brought you these. They're high-altitude flowers."

A wilted glory of colour spilt out on the carpet, large pale flowers, and small brilliant flowers, and spikes of crimson and gold. Kate fell to her knees and scooped them up and held them to her face, her eyes suddenly bright with tears. "Oh, they're wonderful, dear!" she said. "They're absolutely marvellous!"

Goggle jammed his hands in his pockets. "They look like heck to me," he said roughly, "but I remembered you liked that kind of junk"

THERE WERE times during our year in Mexico when we were assailed by doubt, like colonists on a tropical island who sense dimly that they may be going to pieces far more rapidly than they realize. These

misgivings came to us most strongly whenever we thought of The Hall, the school in New England which Goggle was due to enter the following September. What would Mr. Dwight, the headmaster, think of Goggle now, with his moral fibre frayed, his long greasy hair, his bogus sideboards, his appalling manners, his scholastic standing, always precarious, approaching a state of collapse?



"Find out where the boy's mind is," was a favourite axiom with Mr. Dwight. This remark haunted me. Had we looked everywhere? Was it under something?

We ached wanting Goggle to go to The Hall, which for a hundred years had turned out honourable men, trained in the best traditions of our Republic. He was an only child, and some day he had to leave the nest. We wanted him to have the qualities of independence and self-discipline The Hall would give him.

We *had* tried to teach him the rudiments of manners. I had explained that

if it was absolutely necessary to walk in front of a lady, especially an old lady, you tried not to knock her down; and that, although it was customary to hold a lady's chair for her when she sat down at the table, you didn't bully her with this courtesy. ("Hey, Ma! I'm holdin' your chair! D'ya think I want to stand here all night?")

When Goggle himself sat down at the table, the strongest heart, or stomach, quailed. Often Mama could not eat at all. There was ample food, she would point out, and more in the kitchen, so he didn't have to use both hands, and it was customary to eat with the mouth closed, and it wasn't polite to mix all the food on the plate together like wet cement, and you buttered one bite of bread at a time instead of lathering it, you wiped your mouth after drinking milk, you sat straight on your chair with your feet under the table since the chair was not a horse you were riding in a handicap, and you paused now and then between bites to take a breath of air. You did not scratch yourself, and it was not polite to remove food from your mouth to examine it doubtfully before putting it back again, and . . . "I think I'll lie down for a while," Mama said. "Perhaps I can eat a little something later on."

Manners, I explained after she left, were designed to make living more pleasant for people. You combed your hair and washed your face before you came to the dinner table, for instance, so that your appearance would not offend others. "Is that all the meat?" Goggle said

THESE unresolved problems occupied my mind as Goggle and I packed the car for our trip home with the accumulated loot of a year in Mexico.

The first thing Goggle did was break both the back windows Our car was a two-door coupé with a back seat so difficult to get out of that a friend of ours once described the effort as like being born again. Goggle raised the seat so we could pack things underneath, pushing it back mightily, whereupon both back, shatterproof windows burst into rays of crackled glass. I took a deep breath and remembered my manners. "It's perfectly all right," I said, and turned to the next problem.

Goggle had bought two enormous round pottery jars of black Oaxaca clay while being forced to walk through a native market The jars had looked very decorative on our terrace, and it was my thought that they should remain there.

Goggle would have none of this. "I will need them when I am married," he said.

This statement, so mysterious and arbitrary, left me without an answer. I remembered that girls used to collect curious objects for their bottom drawers; possibly Goggle felt it his duty to revive this custom. So the jars went up in the rack on top of the car, with the string hammock he had bought, whose colours ran when it rained, and the chair with the seat he had woven at school in which no one was allowed to sit, and a lamp base of lemon-wood inlaid with shells and stones, an object so hideous that I packed it without demur, reflecting that its presence in Goggle's bottom drawer might discourage any faint-hearted girl lacking in character or devotion.

Goggle had garnered these treasures on the trips we had taken during the school holidays. Never again, perhaps, would the three of us be so close together as we had been on those excursions. A family has to be close in an alien land. We had walked close together; we had talked and listened as one, through Goggle, with his easy knowledge of the tongue. There were moments when the three of us had seemed submerged in a single identity. I thought of this as I packed, sweat on my brow and a lump in my throat. Part of the time I delivered an angry interior monologue at Mr. Dwight. Maybe Goggle didn't have any manners. Maybe his school marks were impossible, and maybe his original innocence had been assailed by cigarettes and dice and draw poker. If Mr. Dwight didn't want him, we did. Our family circle was threatened, and so I took it out on being angry with Mr. Dwight, half hoping he wouldn't want Goggle, and being afraid he might not.

We crept slowly away from the Casa José in our overloaded car. It barely cleared the ground, awash to the axles in woven baskets, serapes, Mexican sandals, metates, oil lanterns made of pierced tins, cooking pots of red clay, and even a country raincoat made of reeds. "Think how decorative it will look on a wall!" Kate had said.

It was a two-day trip to the border and on the day we got there the thermometer read a hundred and fifteen degrees outside the customs office. Inside, there were long tables, on which Goggle and I spread out our loot. We dripped in silent anguish as we unpacked our ridiculous treasures in front of the customs officer, an intelligent and humorous

man. "Very useful," he said, holding up the raincoat made of reeds. The key to the large trunk holding our clothes was on the chain in the ignition switch of the car. The inspector said he would leave the trunk until last, but when he had finished examining the other things he forgot the trunk. I forgot about it, too, but Goggle didn't. "You didn't look in the trunk," he said firmly, holding the key ring out to the inspector.

The customs officer didn't let us down. He patted Goggle on the back, and thanked him gravely, and then he opened the trunk and solemnly examined its contents, while Kate and I stood by, bursting with pride.

At last we gathered up our belongings and crept away, untied and flapping, to the nearest motel, where Papa declared a holiday. We would stay for the night, I said, to rest.

The next morning I slept late and, when I awoke, Kate and Goggle had gone off to town to shop. A note said I would find them at the drugstore after lunch.

When I got to the drugstore in town, Goggle was there alone. I didn't recognize him at first, and when I did, finally, I stood for a moment inside the door and rested my tired old eyes just by looking at him. He had been to the barber. The skin round his head, below the crisp crew cut, was white, like a halo, and his brown face was scrubbed and free of fuzz. He was wearing a new white T-shirt, skin-tight, and new blue jeans, also skin-tight, and new plimsolls; and he sat on a stool at the soda fountain, draining the dregs of a chocolate soda and reading *Popular Mechanics,* just as if the whole year in Mexico had been clipped away in the barber's chair and washed down with a soda.

He looked up and saw me, and got down from the stool. "I want to show you something," he said. He took me outside and pointed at the pile of newspapers on the box outside the door. Above the box was a sign which said, "Please take your own change," and on the top newspaper were a few loose coins. "When I saw that," Goggle said with a grin, "I knew I was home again."

Now you take a school like The Hall, I said to myself. Do you suppose they have any way of knowing how darned lucky they are when a really superior boy comes along?

THE DAY Goggle left for The Hall was an emotional day for all of us. I slept late, wishing to avoid the morning confusion, because Tory

Cummings had spent the night. On such mornings Tory and Goggle sometimes invaded our bedroom early, dear little boys weighing one hundred and fifty pounds in their pants, which they usually were. Where are the eggs, they would demand, towering over us clean-limbed, clear-eyed and pink-cheeked, while we huddled frowzily in bed.

This morning I was awakened by the sound of voices under the window. Kate was in the car ready to take Tory home, and she was having trouble getting out of the driveway. "Ma," I heard Goggle say, in the intolerable flat voice of adolescence, which falls on the ear like an air hammer on asphalt paving, "why don't you put her in reverse?"

"Because I do not wish to," Kate replied, her voice tight with the restraint which indicated that she had been pushed too far. Wearily I sat up on the edge of the bed. Then it hit me again, as it had been hitting me for the past several weeks, only harder. Goggle was going away.

I was in my dressing-gown drinking coffee when they got back from Tory's house, and while Goggle remained outside under the car, trying to see if that new knock meant that the block was about to fall out on the pavement, Kate told me how her day had begun. Tory had been balancing a large wooden salad spoon on his finger while waiting to be served his breakfast (if it occurs to you to ask why he would be holding a wooden salad spoon at the breakfast table, I can't enlighten you) and when his plate was put before him the spoon fell. There were still egg splashes on the wall, and pieces of broken plate were on the draining-board. "At least I got Tory home," Kate said. "Now if I can get Goggle to pack his things, I may survive the day."

I went out and coaxed him from under the car (the front axle looked very doubtful, the exhaust-pipe was worn through in two places, and there was some mysterious thing "hanging down" which probably meant that we needed a new universal joint and would never make it to The Hall). He ascended to his slave-labour with deep groans, and I followed, at Kate's request, to get him started.

"What do I need all this junk for?" he demanded.

I had asked myself that question many times. In Goggle's room, beside the open foot-locker, the Navy duffel bag and the suitcase, were stacks of merchandise purchased from the school list. Who was going to make Goggle wear all those clothes? His invariable costume was worn out blue jeans and a T-shirt, completed by a red ski cap, a Mexican straw

hat, or a top-hat from the town dump. "Please do something about his ties," Kate called from the foot of the stairs.

"Aw, Ma," he said. "I've got a tie."

Actually he had two ties. One, a plaid, had been given him as a child. When tied it came down, roughly, to his breastbone. The other tie he had won at a party for being the most objectionable, or something like that. It was of red and blue rayon and it had a picture on it. I could never bring myself to look at it closely. It was Kate's idea that Goggle should make a selection of ties from my supply. My lack of enthusiasm for this project mystified her. "Let it go," I said. "If he needs ties he can write to us after he gets there."

Goggle's room was depressingly tidy. The disorder of the past had all been swept aside by Mama, wielding a broom like a fury, and the accumulated shambles, a rag-picker's dream, had been sorted and disposed of in the dump, or the dust-bin, or in cartons for storage in the attic, to await Goggle's future sons. ("Wait'll I get my hands on those little jerks," he said. "They won't get away with *anything!*")

I began to pack "Here is your new razor and shaving brush," I said, in a loud, hearty tone "I won't be there to tell you when to take a fast shave, so you'll have to look in the mirror once in a while. Nothing is more offensive to a grown man than peach fuzz on a boy's upper lip. It shows he doesn't respect himself. Are you listening?"

Goggle was tying a monkey's-fist knot in a length of cod line, which he carried in his pocket for spare moments of boredom. "Huh?" he said.

"Give a hand here," I snapped.

"What do you want me to do?" he wailed, quick, adolescent tears springing to his eyes, making me realize all at once how difficult this day was for him.

"Just stand there and hand me things," I said. "Now, about your room-mate—give him a chance, but if you draw an absolute stinker you don't have to put up with it. Write to me. You really don't have to put up with anything, you know. You can always come home."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Goggle said with gusty despair. "I'll get some dope who doesn't know A from B. It *always* happens to *me*"

"Here are some envelopes I've addressed for you," I said. "Please write to us. I've tried to make it as easy as possible for you."

A grin broke over his face, like a rainbow after a storm.

trouser-pockets, and were both so excessively blasé that I wondered if we should prop them against each other so they wouldn't fall down. "Hi," they said. We refrained from overwhelming Jim with the blessings we felt for him. We were nonchalant, too. "Hi," we said.

There was still an hour to go before the boys had to be checked in. We couldn't just stand there saying "Hi" at each other. Would the boys like to ride down to the village for a soda? Jim couldn't. He had promised to meet his parents at the office, he remembered suddenly, like a man gratefully reminded of what it was he had mislaid. He walked away, and the three of us stood together awkwardly, poised at the edge of that moment of first separation. "I'd better stay here," Goggle said. "I might miss something. Good-bye," he said.

We kissed him on the cheek, lightly. We smiled. We said good-bye, and he walked away from us. We stood and watched him, the boy's back that was beginning to be a man's back, the ears that looked as if they might almost belong to his head some day, the feet that he wasn't quite used to yet.

MAIL was delivered at the Cliffside Post Office three times a day, and three times a day we went to the post office During the early period of Goggle's absence my conversations with Kate consisted mainly of two phrases: "No news is good news," and "I'll go for the mail." On Thursday of the second week Kate decided she couldn't go on with it any longer. "I can't help it," she said. "I'm going to call Mr. Dwight."

"No news is good news," I replied.

"If you say that again I may leave you," Kate said.

"I'll go for the mail," I said.

That was the evening the letter came. It was like a war communiqué scrawled in a rather muddy trench during aerial bombardment. "School," Goggle wrote in his dear, boyish, impossible hand, "is, well, O.K. Whew!" We never did find out what that alarming word indicated. "I guess it will improve in time," the letter went on, "and since there is nothing else to say I will stop." After this letter, which was not exactly conducive to long, restful nights, silence closed in again. Parents' Day was six long weeks off, and we longed for it in the same despairing way that small children long for Christmas, even though it did present special problems.

To begin with, Kate said she had nothing at all to wear. After a year in Mexico she didn't even know what women were wearing anyway. She just knew that everything she owned was impossible. She would have to go into town to see what she could do. I planned to wear a smartly conservative tie, and commissioned her to buy me one. "I need," I explained, "the sort of tie you would wear to call on John Foster Dulles. It must be a tie that will say to me when I look in a mirror: you are a father, a pillar of the community, a patriot and a Republican."

"Isn't that asking rather a lot of a tie?" Kate said, bewildered.

"Not at all," I said loftily. "Just explain to the assistant it's for a father to wear to visit his son at a boarding-school."

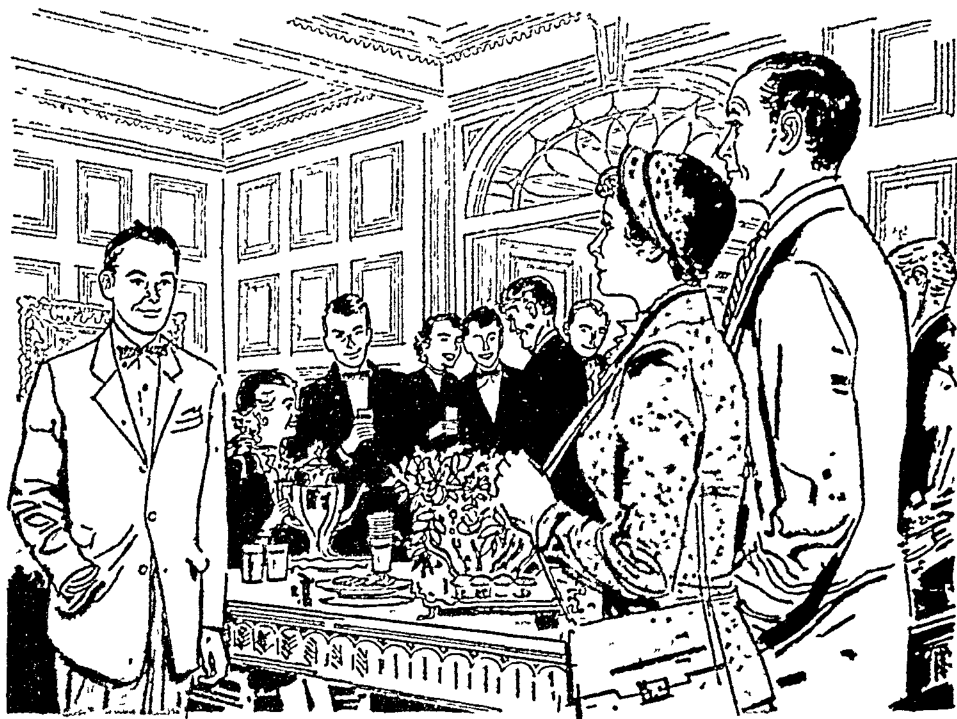
Kate left at dawn one day for New York, and at five o'clock in the evening she returned in despair. She opened the box she was carrying. "I just brought this home to show you the kind of thing I had to put up with," she said. taking a dress from the box. "I'm going to send it back in the morning. Imagine!"

I made commiserating noises for her, and then I asked her about The Tie. She had bought me a tie in dark green and brown regimental stripes, which, like a magic cloak, made you invisible the moment you put it on. It was perfect. My satisfaction cheered Kate so much she went upstairs and tried on all her clothes again, and decided to wear her oldest tweed suit, on the grounds that anything new would make her uncomfortable anyway.

Thus attired we set out in the afternoon before Parents' Day. In our concern to do justice to Goggle we were even later in starting than we intended. My shaving lotion was far too fragrant, I decided, and Kate tried on all her ear-rings before she decided to wear none at all. We didn't arrive in time to see Goggle in the line in the junior football game. He was in the locker-room, we were informed When he had showered and dressed he would meet us in the common-room for tea.

The idea of Goggle's drinking tea almost broke me down. But tea turned out to be cocoa in paper cups, and while we stood in front of the fire-place he appeared. Siegfried in his swan boat could not have thrilled us more. There was Goggle, scrubbed and shining, peach-fuzz-free, his shoes polished, his socks straight, wearing flannel trousers, a jacket, a button-down shirt, and a bow tie in regimental stripes.

We looked at each other across the chasm of the room, and then, with



an expression which Kate and I would never forget—*Goggle looked us up and down to see if we were properly dressed!*

We moved towards each other, too oppressively and breathlessly nonchalant to say anything but the password, "Hi." We smiled at each other shyly. "New tie?" Goggle asked, but even this astonishing question was lost on me as I regarded his own tie with awe. "Did you tie it yourself?" I whispered.

"Of course," Goggle said. I looked round. The room was filling with young men. We stood shoulder deep in bow ties, all in regimental stripes, all tied by the restless souls who wore them. My sartorial instinct had not failed me. I was in. "Won't you sit down, Mother?" Goggle asked. Goggle's mother sat down and almost choked on her cocoa.

WE SPENT the night at the General Lafayette Inn (restored as of January 1, 1776, with plumbing laid on). There we sat in our room, on the candlewick bedspreads, under the Currier and Ives prints.

"His fingernails were clean," Kate said, in a dazed sort of way.

"I heard him say 'Sir' to Mr. Dwight," I marvelled.

"It may all be just a dream."

"Do you think he was drugged?"

"I thought of hypnotism myself."

We fell asleep in this pleasant bewilderment, but in the morning, when we attended Goggle's eight-o'clock class, we began to understand everything. It was then that we learned, once and for all, just what it takes to make a man out of a boy. It's very simple It takes a man.

His name, this teacher of mathematics, was Andrew Sadowsky. Young Mr. Sadowsky was composed, quiet and grave, and it was my impression that he was made of good, seasoned horsehide. Mr. Sadowsky, we learned, had not so long ago been All-American quarter-back at his college, where All-Americans appeared once a generation. He was not only the teacher of mathematics; he was also the football coach, and he had just fathered a son, which meant that the whole school had been given a holiday. It was tradition at The Hall to declare a holiday when a son was born to a master. When a daughter was born to a master I can't remember whether she was drowned, or whether they just played taps and lowered the school flag to half-mast.

Mr. Sadowsky, to continue the catalogue of his perfections, looked rather like a well-kept truck in a tweed jacket, and I had an idea that a good many boys lay awake at night dreaming up impossible feats of strength and skill in emulation of Mr. Sadowsky. By such efforts they would then become Mr. Sadowsky himself, and move about inside his own horsehide skin.

Goggle, we could plainly see, was already practising. It was something more than drugs or hypnotism that made him put his feet down, and move his shoulders as he did now, and regard us with narrowed eyes from a stern, expressionless face He had become so manly he could hardly move his neck, and he had learned to talk without moving his lips. Goggle wasn't Goggle any more. Goggle was Goggle-Sadowsky.

This morning the impossible test which Mr. Sadowsky required of Goggle was to work out a problem in geometry on a square of blackboard, standing with his classmates, a square and a separate problem to each. We sat and watched Goggle, and ached for him, while Mr. Sadowsky stood at the window with his back to the boys, impassive and solid When Goggle went to him at last, tentatively, and cleared his throat, and said, "Sir . . ." Mr. Sadowsky walked to the blackboard,

regarded the problem without change of expression, without removing his hands from his pockets, scarcely moving his lips as he said, "Wrong Do it again," and turned, in his ball-bearing, athlete's way, and went back to his vigil at the window, while Goggle, perspiring but dedicated, erased the whole agonized mass of figures and started over again from the top. Long life to Mr. Sadowsky, I prayed silently. Long life and many sons!

THE REST of the day went by like a breeze. There was the everlasting football game with the school's traditional rival, which *we* won; there was an elegant lunch in the school dining-room, we exchanged manly words with the young masters, all of whom wore tweeds and smoked pipes, and had at least one and possibly one and a half child.

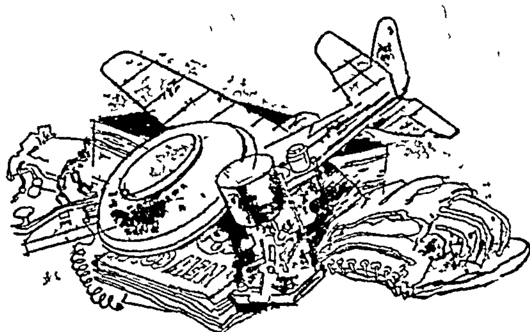
It was almost dusk before Goggle made us go home. We were laughing this time as we got into the car and drove away. We felt young again and happy, and we held hands.

"Let's stop and have dinner at a *very* nice place," Kate said. "With a cocktail first."

"Or maybe two cocktails," I said.

We didn't try to put it into words then, but a wonderful, miraculous hope had begun to blossom in our hearts. Goggle had looked at us when he talked. He had listened when we spoke to him. It was even possible that, in time, he might come to see us as human beings, separate from himself.

Goggle was going to be free.





Bentz Plagemann

When Bentz Plagemann was ten years old, his schoolteacher asked the class to write a sketch in the manner of Dickens The boy carried out the task so well that he was kept back after school and accused of copying Then and there he decided he would be a writer.

His first book was not in fact published until 1941, when he was twenty-eight, but by that time he had acquired considerable knowledge of the book trade, having spent six years working in bookshops in New York, Cleveland and Chicago This was followed by three years' wartime service in the Navy Medical Corps, unhappily brought to an end by an attack of polio His conquest of the disease was described in his book *My Place to Stand,* published here in 1950

Mr Plagemann now lives with his family at Palisades, New York, a town much like the Cliffside of *My Son Goggle*



Illustrations by Francis Marshall

THE SLEEPING PARTNER

A condensation of the book by
WINSTON GRAHAM

"The Sleeping Partner" is published by
Hodder & Stoughton, London

WHY HAD Lynn left him?

For Michael Granville, a successful young scientist, his beautiful wife's disappearance was a totally unexpected blow. It looked like an ending of things. Actually, it was only a beginning: Mike's search for Lynn plunged him at once into a situation that challenged all his moral values, and, in the end, threatened his very life.

A fine suspense novel, set in the world of electronics and atomic-energy research, *The Sleeping Partner* also offers a love story as unexpected as the mystery that envelops it.

"A deeply moving and admirably written story."—*Daily Mail*

"A novel with the impact of a first-class thriller . . . an author with an almost unique understanding of the modern mind."

—*Birmingham Mail*

CHAPTER 1

THE NIGHT Lynn left me I got home quite late, but, it being July, there was still daylight left; and I remember as I came up the drive thinking that since we moved here I'd had no time at all to do the things I'd planned when we bought Greencroft, such as rooting up the laurels and putting in some flowering shrubs instead.

The garage doors were open and I tapped my horn as I drove in. I knew I wouldn't be popular, but I ran up the front steps and walked in with my usual whistle I hoped at least that she hadn't waited for her own meal. It was semi-dark in the house and no lights. She didn't answer, so I whistled again and went into the drawing-room, the room she'd had decorated according to her own design. There was no one there, but at the back now I could hear Kent barking a welcome.

I wished Lynn hadn't taken against Kent so much; he was a bull terrier we'd inherited from my sister when she went abroad. I went through into the kitchen switching on lights and found the oven cold and no evidence of dinner. The picture then began to come in quite clearly that my wife was not here.

With so much going on at the factory I might have forgotten some plan she'd made for us, and as I went upstairs I tried to remember whether she'd said anything before I left. I went into our bedroom with its egg-shell blue wall-paper and off-white hangings, through to the spare room, done rather less sumptuously, and to the second and third spare rooms, not yet done at all. Then I went downstairs again and let Kent out, and he licked me madly all over. That of course was what Lynn didn't like about him; he was a delayed adolescent and at five years of age still flung himself about in ecstasies of juvenile enthusiasm.

It seemed likely she'd gone out somewhere and been delayed—perhaps she had phoned the works after I left. She hadn't gone by car because her little M.G. was in the garage.

The thing now was to get my own meal and have enough ready for her if she needed something when she came in. I went to work in the kitchen, assisted by Kent, who slid between my legs every time I walked across the place. After supper I had a cigarette; by then it was ten thirty.

I rang up her mother. They didn't get on particularly well, but I had to start somewhere. Mrs. Carson said in an aggrieved voice that she hadn't seen or even heard from Lynn for over five weeks.

I tried Simon Heppelwhite in London next. He was an old friend, a stage designer, a bachelor still although well on in his forties. Lynn had worked for him before she married me, and he was the one who had first introduced us. He said, in his slightly pontifical way "Lynn? No, Michael. Is anything wrong?"

"No, of course not. I just wondered if she might have taken root at your studio."

"I only wish she came more often these days But she seems to have matters of more importance on her mind."

"What sort of matters?"

"I hadn't considered. I imagined it was looking after you."

Because I knew him so well I thought I noticed something in his voice. "Seriously, Simon. If Lynn's there with you now . . . ."

"No, Michael; seriously. I'd help you if I could."

Feeling rather a fool, I hung up. I almost decided not to try anyone else or I should look still more of an idiot. It occurred to me, too, that Lynn really had only a very few close friends. I waited till eleven and then I thought of our cleaning woman, Mrs. Lloyd, but it was too late

Just then the phone rang. I was across the room very quickly. "Hullo!"

"Mike? This is Frank Dawson."

From the factory. Fire, accident? "What is it?"

"I was going to leave this till morning, but I wanted a private word about Read. Is Lynn with you?"

"Lynn? No. Not at the moment."

"I want to have a serious chat with you about Read some time. It

looks to me that he hasn't learned a thing from the mess we had in February."

I said, "I'm sorry, Frank, this'll have to wait until morning.

There was an offended pause at the other end. *"I'm* sorry if I've barged in on something——"

I tried to swallow my impatience. "I have got something on at the moment, and anyway it's a bit late. Come to my office about ten tomorrow, will you?" I hung up sharply. I would make one more call. I rang Ray French.

Ray was a pianist who worked for a music publisher, and when he answered my call I could hear music in the background.

"This is Mike Granville," I said. "I suppose you haven't seen anything of Lynn today, have you?"

"Wait a jiffy." There was a pause The gramophone stopped in mid-phrase. "What did you say?"

"I wondered if you'd seen Lynn today."

"I haven't *seen* her. I rang her about six but, alas, no reply. Have you lost her?"

"Temporarily. She's probably forgotten the time. I thought I'd check just in case you were the culprit"

"No, old boy . . . . Oh, I say, Lynn did mention when she phoned me on Monday something about being away this week-end. I said I might drop in on Saturday with some records she'd ordered and she said she might be away. But of course you'll know about that."

I said, to give myself time to think: "Well, it's only Thursday night, isn't it?"

"Of course. Anyway, when she does turn up ask her to ring me in the morning about those records, will you?"

"I will. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

WHEN someone isn't home when you expect them to be, when after a decent interval they still don't turn up, it's natural to get a bit anxious. But still there's no exact moment before which it would be silly to ring the police or the nearest hospital and after which it would be silly not to Your ears are all the time waiting for the click of the door, the quick familiar footstep and the breathless glove-peeling apology.

Especially so in Lynn's case because she always had been a bit bohemian in her habits Once when we were engaged she'd completely forgotten to meet me, and after waiting an hour I'd gone to her flat and found her curled in front of the fire, making toast.

So I didn't do anything more to find her all night. I got undressed and sat in bed smoking in the dark. I don't know what time I went to sleep, but when I woke up and switched on the light the other bed was still empty. It was twenty past three and I kept the light on because by then I was wide awake and worried.

I couldn't make out why Lynn had told Ray French she might be away this week-end; so far as I knew we'd planned nothing.

For some reason I began to think of that evening in February when Ray had first called on us here. It was the week I had had the row with the Government atomic-energy people at Harwell over a delay in completing contracts; and I remember driving up to the house in a fairly preoccupied frame of mind. Lynn came out to meet me. She was wearing a new green frock that made you think of the silky sheaths of tulips.

"Darling, is Ray's car in the way? He's going in a minute."

She kissed me and her brown eyes went over me in the observing way they had Ray had just got up from the piano and was picking up his cheroot from the ash-tray. He was thirty-five, well turned out, sophisticated and handsome.

"Hello, Mike. I've come to see your mansion at last. It's very grand."

I'd said: "Lynn, have we enough dinner for three?"

"He says he won't stay."

"Not won't, can't." Ray ran a hand carefully over his smooth fair hair. "I'm sorry, sorry, darling. But ask me another time, please. How's the new factory, Mike?"

"Very new." I took a drink from Lynn, and smiled at her.

"And hush-hush electronics still?"

"Less hush-hush than the old place to look at. This is all concrete floors and metal windows. I rather miss the cobwebby stairs."

"How many people have you got there now?"

"About eighty. There's room for a hundred and fifty if we could find enough electricians."

He whistled. "Big business. And d'you go down and ravish them with your presence, Lynn?"

"I used to while it was being built, but not much now."

I glanced at her quickly. "This year it's been taking too much of my time. But I've no intention of letting it get permanently in the way of a happy married life."

Ray looked at Lynn and laughed his infectious laugh. "No, I wouldn't either, if I were you."

When he'd gone, I said: "I wish you could get more company of his sort It's what you need here."

Her hair looked like pale floss silk as she put away the records Ray had brought. "He won't come often. Greencroft is too far out."

I said: "I wonder why he hasn't made the grade as a pianist He seems first rate to me. It must be galling to have to take a job with a music publisher when you're that good."

"Five years in the army didn't help," she said.

"In a way I envy him. He's artistic, able to gossip about matters that interest you. By the way, it's still true what I said tonight."

"What's true?"

"That I'm not going to let things run on as they are. But you've got to be patient for a bit longer, darling. Don't imagine I love work all that much. It's only a question of time."

That was the nearest I got to telling her about the crisis with the people at Harwell. I thought to save her worry, but each day's silence led to the next. Technically, she was a partner in the firm with a small holding of stock from which she got enough to keep herself handsomely in spending money; but she seemed to have no interest in the firm and to take our prosperity for granted.

I MUST have dozed off unexpectedly, because I woke to hear someone knocking. It was daylight. My watch said twenty to seven and the other bed was still empty.

The knocking was from the back door, and, dragging on a dressing-gown, I went to the landing window, which looked out over the back. There was an umbrella there. When the window opened the umbrella moved. It was Mrs. Lloyd, our cleaning woman

"Good morning, Mr. Granville Overslept a bit?"

"No, surely you're early."

"It's twenty-five to eight"

I looked at my watch again. It had stopped. "Wait a minute, I'll let you in."

I went down into the hall and was about to step into the kitchen when I saw the post had come. There were a couple of bills and a letter.

The letter was from Lynn. I ripped open the envelope and stared at what she had written.

My dear Mike,

I expect I should put this on my dressing-table or on the mantelpiece, but somehow I shy away from the hackneyed move even when I am doing the hackneyed thing I realize that by posting this at the corner instead of leaving it I may give you a slightly disturbed night—that's if you happen to notice I'm not there when you get home.

Mike, I'm leaving you. Does that surprise you? And will you really mind? I'm the wrong sort of wife for you, Mike. Oh, there have been good times, but they don't happen any more for either of us, so it's not a lot of good going on pretending. I won't be around any longer to trouble your conscience or to cramp your style.

I'm taking a flat in London for a few weeks while things straighten themselves out. I'm not leaving the address because you might try to see me, and I believe it would be better if we didn't meet again. If you really want to answer this, write to the bank and they will forward it.

With regret—and still some affection,

Lynn

Someone was knocking. I put the letter back in its envelope. "Michael Granville, Esq.," Lynn had written, "Greencroft, Hockbridge, Beds." Shoving the envelope into my pocket, I went to let Mrs. Lloyd in.

"Good morning, Mr. Granville." She folded her umbrella and insinuated herself past me. "Nasty morning, isn't it?"

I said: "My—I forgot to wind my watch."

She glanced inquisitively at me through her thick spectacles. "I expect it's keeping these late hours. I'll make you a cup of tea."

Mrs. Lloyd was always a shade too sweet for me. I said bluntly: "Mrs Granville's not here."

"No, Mr. Granville. So she told me just before I left yesterday. You'll be quite a bachelor for a few days, I suppose."

"Yes," I said. "But I expect we shall manage."

"I'll get everything for your supper so you'll just have to switch on. I hope her mother will be better soon."

"Yes," I said. So Lynn had covered up. Mrs. Lloyd with her intense nose for scandal hadn't smelt this one out yet.

Presently I found I'd gone upstairs and was shaving. I cut myself on the chin, and couldn't find my own tooth-paste and had to use Lynn's I wondered then, and tried to think it out, where the first crack had really shown, where the first wrong move was made. Had I made a bloomer in building a new factory in an outlying town, uprooting Lynn from our flat in London and expecting her to take root in the country? Should I have stayed where I was, cramped in rat-ridden quarters in the city, when I had Government priority and encouragement to build the new works in Letherton?

Part of the trouble was that the firm of Granville and Company was still very much a one-man affair, there was really nobody besides me at all able or willing to take authority. My two right-hand men, Frank Dawson and Bill Read, for some reason hated each other and got in each other's way at every opportunity. This had been the chief cause of the mess with the atomic-energy people, when the details of our move into the new factory had completely swamped me and the production had to be left to them.

But could overwork and neglect ever *really* break a marriage that hadn't got dry rot already in its foundations? I went to the works as usual. Sometimes when you've had a partial knock-out something goes on functioning even when the higher levels are closed. It was a twenty-five-minute drive to Letherton, and this morning there was the customary pile of letters on my desk.

I'd dictated a couple of replies when Frank Dawson came in. He was a sardonic, black-haired, strong-featured man who was the head of our laboratory. He had been with me a long time; in fact he could have been my partner if he'd been more willing to carry some of the weight This morning as usual he was gunning for Bill Read. He said· "I brought you this, Mike. It should rejoice your soul. Exhibit D, the fourth in two weeks"

It was a bit of work done by a new hand and ruined by having a five-sixteenths screw used in place of a quarter-inch. Read, as works manager, was trying to improve production by switching workers about, and this, Frank maintained, was the outcome. Not feeling very patient, I pacified him as best I could; and presently he dried up and stood pushing back

his black hair and staring out into the rain. I said: "Anything else, Frank?"

"Yes. When you've time. I've made a final selection from the IDA drawings, but I want your approval before I go ahead."

I sighed. The IDA was a directional-system project which I'd turned over to Frank. "I'll come and look in a minute. I must do a bit of phoning first. Is Mrs. Curtis in the laboratory?"

"Yes."

He hesitated at the door. "There's one other thing, Mike. I've a basket of strawberries for Lynn. Home grown."

"Oh, thanks," I said awkwardly. "That's nice of you. You must—look in on us some time soon."

"You're a bit distant now. Twelve miles is twelve times as far as it was in the old days in London."

When he'd gone I sat for a minute fiddling with the piece of damaged equipment. Then I pressed the inter-com switch and told them to get me the manager of the Pall Mall branch of the National Provincial Bank. While I was waiting I lit a cigarette.

"The manager is on the line now, Mr. Granville."

I said: "Good morning. My name is Granville. My wife, Mrs. Lindsey Granville, banks with you."

"Of course. Mrs. Granville called in to see me this week."

"Yes, well . . . she's staying in London at the moment in a friend's flat, and I seem to have lost the address. I wonder if you could tell me what it is."

There was a pause at the other end. "Hullo," I said. "You have her address?"

"Er—yes, she gave it to us this week. We were to forward correspondence. . . . Actually, Mr. Granville, this puts us in rather a difficult position. Mrs. Granville left with us instructions not to give her address to anyone. Naturally——"

"I do happen to be her husband."

"Exactly. But in the face of these instructions, would you allow us to write Mrs. Granville and get her permission?"

"Can't you phone her?"

"Unfortunately she didn't leave a number."

"When would you hear?"

"Let me see, today's Friday. We should get our answer by Monday. If you'd care to ring us then . . . or we'll ring you."

"Thank you," I said. "Perhaps you'll ring me."

WHEN I put down the phone, Bill Read came in. I went with him into the factory to inspect some monitors we were making for a South African diamond syndicate. They would be installed at the gates of the mine so that if anyone went through carrying a diamond—even if it were inside him—an alarm bell rang.

While we were messing about, Read said suddenly, "Dawson's been complaining again, hasn't he?"

"My dear Read," I said, "Frank's head of the laboratory and pretty smart there but he doesn't understand a thing about factory organization. You make what arrangements you think fit. I can't be a universal Aunt Nellie for the whole bloody factory."

Read grinned his fox-terrier grin. "Anyway, don't you want to know what I've done about that last foul-up?"

"Not particularly."

"Thanks . . . In fact I've taken steps. I don't think it'll happen again."

After that I went down the passage to the laboratory. Only Frank Dawson was there, and Stella Curtis. They didn't hear me come in and I stared across at Stella Curtis for a bit. If my marriage had smashed up for the reasons Lynn implied, then the job this girl was working on was as responsible for the break as any other single thing. Or perhaps the cynics would have said it was because of Stella Curtis herself.

I'D ENGAGED Stella in March as Dawson's assistant in the laboratory. She was twenty-six, had a good university degree, and had worked in electronics at the Nuffield Research Laboratories at Oxford. That was four years ago and apparently she'd left there to get married. She didn't explain why she wanted a job now.

She was an attractive, pale girl with dark curly hair, and those noticeable blue eyes which some dark girls have. She seemed to know quite a lot about the theoretical side of our work, and had even earned Frank's respect. All the same, although I knew she was a find, I didn't have a lot to do with her personally for the first seven or eight weeks. It wasn't until the thing at Harwell flared up and David Thurston suddenly

became a figure of importance in our future that I decided that she was just the person to help us.

David Thurston was a queer chap, half scientist, half civil servant, who divided his time between the laboratories at Harwell and the office of the Atomic Energy Authority in London. After meeting on various back-room jobs during the war, we'd kept in touch because of a common interest in air-borne prospecting. With his help I'd built an entirely new and simplified type of scintillometer—a piece of equipment used for locating uranium deposits. We had only been able to test it by car, but with very promising results.

After my bust-up with Harwell in February Thurston had remained my only contact; and one day in May he'd phoned to ask if I would be willing to take on a rush job of making an air-borne scintillometer for an urgent Government requirement—if so, this was my big chance to put the firm of Granville and Company back where everyone wanted it to be. I didn't take long to think that over, so he came and explained exactly what was in the wind, and I had Stella Curtis in to meet him. The upshot was that when I went to Harwell I took her with me.

Harwell is forty miles from Letherton, and when we got there I found it was a rather more imposing conference than I'd ever been to before. There were nine or ten of us present, including a man from the Foreign Office, a Wing Commander and Steel—the geophysicist with whom I'd had words in February.

Dr. Bennett, one of Harwell's leading experts, whom I already knew and liked, was in charge. He began by explaining that certain territory situated between the Sudan and Uganda was due to be handed over to the Sudan about six months after Sudanese independence was granted—that was, six months from the coming August. This territory had never been fully prospected—and recently there had been reports of uranium deposits. The Government felt that we couldn't afford to let radio-active sources still in our hands drift without safeguard into the possession of a country which, under the influence of Egypt, might lease them irresponsibly; but before diplomacy could move it had to make sure of its facts. That could be done quickly enough only by aerial survey.

All equipment that had so far been used for aerial prospecting, however, was too heavy for our purposes. The Government wanted to be as unobtrusive as possible, and to use the smallest possible plane. That was



where our new scintillometer fitted in; for when fully developed it would be, we hoped, much lighter and at the same time more precise than other surveying equipment.

The meeting went into a great many technicalities. When it broke up I walked back with Thurston and Mrs. Curtis to another office and we went through the alterations which would be necessary in the scintillometer design. I could see plenty of rocks ahead, and since the Foreign Office wanted to see the plane in operation by early September I felt anxious about the time element.

Stella Curtis had been quiet enough, but at the end she asked two acute questions, and Thurston, whom I'd always thought too rarefied to notice a pretty girl, suddenly asked her if she'd been to Harwell before. When she said no, he offered to show her over. So we were taken round the "hot" laboratories, where the doors open as you walk up to them to avoid the need for touching them with contaminated gloves, and the air-conditioning plant changes the air several times a minute. Then we went along to the nuclear piles, with those odd nightmare-fairy-tale names of Gleep and Bepo and Dimple. They're never very impressive, surrounded as they are by seven feet of reinforced concrete caught up in a mass of dials and girders, but she seemed to find them interesting.

When we left I decided to call in at my home, which was only five miles off course, and get the drawings and plans I'd been making for the IDA—our directional-system project. If I was going to be occupied with this new thing it was time Frank Dawson had a shot at them.

Stella Curtis had been quiet on the way back, and I suppose I should have noticed she was looking off-colour when I showed her into the drawing-room. Lynn always went to London on a Wednesday and Mrs. Lloyd left about twelve, but we just caught her.

She peered up at me through her glasses and said: "You're not staying for lunch, Mr. Granville? If you like, I'll——"

"No, no, we'll only be here a few minutes. Don't bother to wait."

I was upstairs about ten minutes altogether, collecting the drawings, and when I came down I found Stella sitting on the settee looking at a photograph she'd taken off the piano. Then I suddenly saw that her usual nice paleness had taken on a look like a second carbon copy. I said, was she all right? and she said: "I'm sorry, Mr. Granville, I've been feeling a bit off since we left Harwell."

"*I'm* sorry. . . . Is there anything I can do?"

"I wonder if I could have a drink of water?"

I went to the cabinet at the end of the room and poured her a brandy and soda. She was lying back against the end of the settee and I told her to put her feet up. When she didn't I put them up for her and gave her the brandy to drink. After she'd sipped for a minute or two the colour began to come back. "What a fool I feel," she said. "It's only happened once before—the same cause I think—disturbed night, overslept, and no breakfast."

"Stay where you are. There's no hurry."

Finally she sat up. "Sorry. It won't happen again."

"Take your time. It could come to anyone."

We were silent on the drive back to Letherton She said · "Were those your children in the photograph?"

"My sister's We haven't any children. Have you?"

"No"

Something made me add "When you're making bits for pilotless interceptors to destroy things with atomic war-heads, the future for the human race doesn't look specially rosy. I don't think I want to see children of mine growing up in a world of ten or twenty years ahead."

"No," she said, but doubtfully.

Near Letherton I said: "Are you all right now?"

"Yes. I don't know what got into me. But as it's nearly one, d'you mind if I drop off here and have lunch at home?"

"Where do you live?"

"At the cottage past those next trees."

I slowed the car. "Does your husband get home to lunch?"

She fumbled for her bag. "Yes, he's always in."

"He'll be glad to see you, then."

"Yes."

I left her there, and before I'd gone a hundred yards I'd forgotten her, thinking about this Harwell job which might settle the future of Granville and Company—not perhaps its existence, but whether it did the sort of work I wanted it to do.

It was seven or eight weeks after I started work on the scintillometer—only a week before Lynn left me—that she and I had the fiasco at

Glyndebourne. At the time it didn't seem as important as it did later.

Those weeks had been hectic. Very nearly everything had gone wrong with the new project; but the Glyndebourne Opera Festival was one of the never-miss things in our lives, so I'd arranged to slip away immediately after lunch, pick Lynn up, change, and get across London to the opera by half past five. In the end, in spite of cutting my lunch, it was well after two before I left the works. At a quarter to three I drew up in the drive and found Lynn already changed, looking absolutely beautiful in a white frock with long white lace gloves. Her expression wasn't right for the sunny afternoon, but I kissed her and ran upstairs and began to drag on a dinner-jacket.

At three five we were off, and I thought we'd made up the time lost. But I'd reckoned without the traffic. Lynn was on wires, for if you're late at Glyndebourne it means staying out until the interval. For over two hours, with the sun beating down into the car, I hogged the road, sweating, cutting in and out. As I drove into the car park at Glyndebourne the last bell was ringing. Lynn slid out and I followed her at the double. We just scraped in as the attendant shut the doors.

What followed was no fault of Glyndebourne. I had arrived in a lather like an over-driven horse, to sit in a crowded auditorium and listen to one of Gluck's most funereal operas sung in French. It was all right for ten or fifteen minutes, but after that as I relaxed in my seat I began to feel sleepy The first two or three times my eyes closed I didn't take much notice. Then the figures on the stage grew bleary and I felt my head begin to move.

A nudge on my arm jerked me back to reality I glanced at Lynn, made an apologetic face and turned guiltily to the stage. Just in time the curtain came down and I breathed again properly, released from the dreadful hypnotism of the lights.

Lynn said: "For *heaven's* sake, Mike!"

"*Terribly* sorry." I touched her hand. "I'll be all right after a breather." I moved to get up.

"You *can't* go now!" she whispered. "It's only Scene One."

The lights were lowered again. I hadn't often seen Lynn so furious. Of course, she couldn't be expected to understand the wear and tear on me of these last few weeks.

Suddenly the stage blurred again. I could see three of everything, then

one, then no outlines at all. I started nervously as Lynn kicked my foot, and the heavy programme slipped off my knees. One or two people along the row turned and looked. I sat back and stared again at that mesmeric stage, and my jaw muscle quivered and shook with trying to suppress one yawn after another.

The curtain came down again at last. With a terrific sense of relief I followed Lynn out, and we went into the dining-room.

Suddenly she said: "I wonder if we shall ever make a go of it."

"A go? Of what?"

"Our marriage."

I said, startled: "We've been getting along for three years."

"Have we?"

I swallowed. "It was my impression. I'm sorry if it isn't yours."

She glanced across the room; her eyes stayed there too long. Her face looked very white. When she didn't say anything more, I said: "This evening I've behaved like a moron, and I'm terribly sorry. I happened to be short of sleep, and getting so hot——"

"Oh, don't go on, please," she said. "Don't go on."

As she turned, her expression was hurt and angry and in a queer way rather frightened.

I said: "Aren't you feeling well?"

"I was feeling well until I had to wait an hour for you to come home, and then had to cling to the car while you drove like a madman, and then, having practically *run* into the theatre, being unable to keep my thoughts on the stage for a moment for fear you'd fall out of your seat. It *can't* go on like this, Mike."

I began to feel rather sick. "What do you suggest?"

She put her knife and fork down. "I can't eat this."

"Try."

She said: "I've been trying for quite a long time."

"Lynn . . . ."

"Please let's *drop* it now. I feel so ill I can't talk any more."

After a while we both finished the meal somehow. When the bill came I could see a slackening of tension. As we got up to go, others were moving and I said suddenly: "There's Ray French."

"Is it? . . . Well, *don't* bring him over here now!"

"We can't get out of it. He's seen us."

Ray had a girl with him of about twenty-one, with shy grey eyes and a creamy skin. Her clothes looked as if they came from Paris, but she hadn't quite the knack of making the best of them.

"My dear Lynn. And Mike. I don't think you know Miss du Caine? Two very dear friends of mine, Margot."

He was in very good spirits. Lynn put the best face on it, but I saw him once looking at her curiously. I tried to make conversation with Miss du Caine.

After a while we got away, and presently went back to hear the opera out.

I KEPT myself busy all that first day that Lynn left me, but I don't think I got through much work. When I arrived home, late, I was surprised to find Mrs. Lloyd still there. She said: "Well, I didn't rightly know what to do. And then there was Kent."

I said: "If it weren't for Kent I'd go over to the Old Bull in Letherton while Mrs. Granville is away. It would save your looking after me."

"Well, you know, I always *like* doing that, Mr. Granville. But if you've the mind to go, Mr. Lloyd and I could take Kent."

"I should be very grateful indeed. I'll drop in with him tomorrow morning."

When she'd gone I wandered through the house. Working at Letherton hadn't been so bad, but here I felt absolutely lost and desolate. I was still in love with Lynn, and she knew it. If it came to the point I'd throw up even the factory to make her happy. Why hadn't she been willing to face me out?

In the night I woke again, as I had the night before, but this time with the unpleasant feeling that somebody was downstairs.

CHAPTER 2

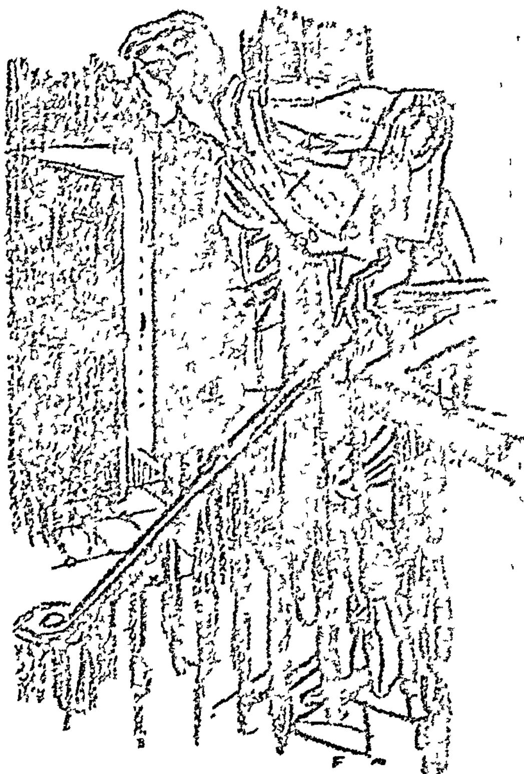
I SAT up sharply in bed and listened, feeling sure my ears had heard something before I was awake. A moon had come up behind the trees, and light fell through the undrawn curtains.

Something moved in the room below.

I threw the bedclothes back and swung out of bed, feeling for my slippers. I went down the stairs and stopped half-way, trying to make

sense of it. There was no light, but I could see by the narrow moonlit rectangle that the front door was partly open. You could tell too by the fresh air coming up.

Step by step now, eyes a little more used to the gloom. Over to the door. I pulled it wider and looked out. No one. As I was turning to go back into the house I saw the glint of a key in the Yale lock. I couldn't believe my eyes. I pulled it out, stared. Only one person besides myself had a key.



Back in the hall I moved quietly towards the door of the drawing-room. As I got near it, something else came. All the time I'd known her Lynn had used a particular perfume, made by Jacques Fath; you couldn't mistake it. I was sure then.

"Lynn!" I burst into the drawing-room.

It was darker here, the windows away from the moon. As I groped for the switch the french windows swung back. The lights went on. Papers on the floor. I ran to the window. "Lynn!"

A shadow moved across the lawn and was gone into the trees.

"Lynn!" I said again. "Come back!" I went down the two steps. Wet grass flicked my ankles as I ran across it.

Much darker in the trees. The little fool, coming back in the middle of the night. "Lynn!" I shouted. "Wait!"

But when I heard a car start I was too far away. By the time I got to the hedge there was only a red tail-light, like a cigarette end, dying in the distance.

In anger and disappointment I went back into the house. Kent was

barking now, the silly fool, half an hour late. What had she come back for, and why at night? Her scent was still strong in the drawing-room and I found that a small pocket vial of it had been knocked over in the desk among the scattered papers, bills and circulars. I couldn't remember what she kept in the desk, except a few household accounts. Most of her stuff was upstairs.

Cold now and fed up, I shut the french windows, bolted them, and glanced round. So far as I could see she had taken nothing. Then I saw something glistening by the leg of the settee. It was one of the turquoise ear-rings I had bought her on our first anniversary. They were her favourites, and she used them only on special occasions. I wondered in what way this was a special occasion. I wondered whose car she had borrowed. Perhaps she had been to a night-club with friends and had driven here afterwards. Or perhaps she had come out with some man alone.

I SPENT most of Saturday afternoon and evening working with Stella Curtis and a good part of Sunday at the works alone. I'd got into the habit of dropping her at her house on the way home, but on Saturday evening when I slowed down she said: "I wonder if you'd care to come in for a few minutes to meet my husband?"

It was hard to say no.

As I followed her into their cottage a tall bony man got up from sitting by the fire and shook my hand. I knew by now that he was an invalid, but no more. The first thing I noticed was that he was a lot older than his wife, then that his gaunt look wouldn't have mattered if it hadn't been so papery and bloodless.

"I'm glad you've called, Mr. Granville. I've been hoping to meet you for quite a while."

"It's high time I did, to apologize for overworking your wife so much in the last two months."

I took the chair and the cigarette offered me and said: "I don't know if Stella has explained what we've been working on."

He smiled slightly. "Something of it. . . ."

"The crisis this week," I said carefully, "was that we got all the equipment lashed up for preliminary testing, and found as soon as we switched on that the circuit was insensitive. I don't know if that means much to

you, but that's the chief reason I had to leave your wife on your doorstep at well after midnight last Monday."

"And did you trace what was wrong?"

"Eventually."

There was a short silence.

"Stella told me you were not well," I said. "I'm sorry."

"Oh, things will be better for me soon," he said rather brusquely. "It's only a question of time."

"Anyway," I said, "perhaps you'd like to know that your wife has been absolutely splendid on this job. She's been three times as good as most people could possibly have been."

Curtis glanced across at Stella. "She's three times as good at most things. Looking after me among them."

Stella raised her head. She had flushed slightly, but her eyes were quite clear. "Very handsome of you both. You know I think this calls for a drink."

We talked for quite a while after that. I wasn't particularly attracted to John Curtis; he was quite impressive, but I suspected him of being very much the professional sick man, and it didn't seem a happy arrangement that a girl like Stella should be tied to an invalid twenty years older than herself. Still the talk and the company did me good. Away from the laboratory Stella was quite different, eager, amusing, easy to be with; also, whether you liked John Curtis or not, you didn't doubt his head-piece.

Just before I left, the talk came round to a point where Curtis said: "Stella tells me you think it a mistake to have children these days."

So she'd told him that. "It's a matter of opinion."

"Because of the risk of atomic warfare?"

"That among other things."

"But life has never been without risk, has it? Every generation has its own hazards. In most centuries until this one, if you had ten children and four grew up you were doing pretty well. Doesn't it rather depend on the value you set on life? If life has any value at all, then it's worth creating."

"Even if it's burnt up in a single explosion that destroys the world?"

He took out his pipe and tapped the dead tobacco into the grate. "Well, even supposing that does happen—the importance of being alive and

what we do with our existence up to that moment hasn't been lost—surely. We're part of an evolutionary process. The end of the material experiment doesn't necessarily mean the end of the spiritual one."

"Doesn't it?"

"Well, not unless you question the existence of the spirit at all."

"I think I do doubt it. I certainly doubt it as something that can be unhitched from the body. It's an attitude of mind, that's all."

He reached for his pouch and Stella passed it to him with a swift rustling movement of her frock and then was quiet again, profile turned towards us, detached but listening.

He said: "I've met a lot of people like you, but I still don't know how any of you work. I don't know why the wheels continue to go round at all."

I felt rubbed up the wrong way. "Modern science has no use for out-of-date fairy tales. It accepts what can be proved."

John Curtis lit his pipe. I think his hands always trembled when he did this. "I wonder if the science that you practise lets its view be crowded up by non-important things. One kind of science sees a religious structure and attacks it from the top, breaking down what it doesn't like until what's important is buried in the ruins. My science would ignore present religious structures and work from the bottom building up. It then might find—I think it does find—that the thing it has built, entirely on scientific premises, has an extraordinary identity with nearly all the religious structures that man has been evolving ever since he crept out of the cave."

I wondered what he meant by scientific premises—half-baked assumptions?—but I could hardly ask.

"I do think it vitally important," he went on, "that scientists like you shouldn't restrict yourselves to a narrow technical view of life. I'm not talking so much about the pure scientist—he usually sees the mystery behind the technical tricks—it's the applied scientist who's the danger. He is too likely to think life is not a trust to be handed on but a sordid mistake that can't be explained."

I LEFT soon after. Stella walked with me to the gate. I said: "I hope I haven't tired him. Is he seriously ill?"

She hesitated. "Yes, quite. It's—a form of anæmia."

"This life must be pretty heavy on you."

"What, looking after him? No," she said. We had got to the gate. She added rather formally: "I hope your wife won't be annoyed at our keeping you so long."

"She isn't there to get annoyed. As a matter of fact, she's left me." I don't know why I said it then; but it came out.

Stella said lightly: "How long is she going to be away?"

"So far as I know at the moment she isn't coming back."

There was a silence. Then she said, "I *am* sorry. When was it?"

"Thursday last."

"Did you—know it was coming?"

"No. I've been more than usually dull. Keep this to yourself, won't you? I'm not looking for shoulders to weep on."

"I can only say again, I'm sorry."

"That's all there is to say."

When I arrived in my office on Monday morning the buzzer was going. Miss Allen spoke through to me. "It's that bank again. The manager wants to speak to you."

"Oh," I said. "Put him through."

"Mr. Granville? . . . This is Fellowes at the National Provincial Bank. We've just had a letter from your wife."

"Well?"

"I'm afraid it's—not very helpful to you, sir. She—er—re-states her request that we should not disclose her present address to anyone."

"Did you tell her who wanted to know?"

"Of course. I assumed you wished us to do that."

"Yes," I said. "Thanks."

After I'd hung up, I asked Miss Allen to get me my mother-in-law's number. While I waited I made perplexed stabs with the end of my pencil in the blotting-paper. "You're through," said Miss Allen.

"Mrs. Carson? This is Mike."

"Oh, Mike, I phoned you twice yesterday but couldn't get any answer. I had a letter from Lynn on Friday."

"What did it say?"

"It made me feel quite ill. She said she was—leaving you. Mike, whatever has happened?"

"I think maybe she's tired of me. . . ." Lynn's mother didn't answer. "Does she give some other reason?"

"She doesn't give her reasons at all. It's years since she asked my advice about anything."

I said. "Does she give her address in London?"

"Yes, she does. But, oh, Mike, she told me not to tell you."

"Don't you think I'm entitled to know?"

"It isn't what I think, dear. I think she should never have left you. . . . Mike, can't it be patched up?"

"There'd be more likelihood of that if I could go and see her."

"Well, it's—9a, Grosvenor Court Mews, W.1. Mike, dear, if you do go, don't tell her where you got the address."

"I promise."

"If I might give you a word of advice, dear . . . be firm with her. I never could be firm enough."

I said: "Nor I."

"Perhaps that's it."

When I'd rung off I stared at the address, scribbled on the memo pad. But now that I had the address I hesitated whether to use it. The episode of Friday night was heavy on my mind. Clearly she'd not been willing to face me then. What *earthly* good would it do forcing myself on her if she were in that mood?

Finally I decided to write her in care of the bank and keep the fact that I knew where she was as a last resort. After a long time I managed to get the words down on paper.

My dear Lynn,

Your letter floored me when it came. I suppose I've been like a short-sighted bus driver blundering on in spite of the warning signals; now I'm complaining because the bus has gone over the edge.

Well, it *has* gone over the edge for me. I haven't written before because I hoped to be able to come and see you and see what could be salvaged from the wreck Don't you think we should meet? There won't be a scene.

Darling, I know all this year you've only had twenty-five per cent of a husband. If that's why you left, then I'm willing to give up whatever you say and begin again on entirely different lines. If you've left me for another man it's going to be rather tough. But I still want to see you and hear about it in so many words It can't be any worse than not knowing.

But I'm not going to try to see you, Lynn, until you give me the signal.

You left your key on Friday night, and I've put it under the geranium pot in the porch Come back any time you like and fetch the things you want. You also dropped one of your turquoise ear-rings, which I'm sending with this.

With regret—as you say—but with very much affection,

Mike

NEXT MORNING my friend Thurston rang from Harwell to know when the survey equipment would be ready.

I said: "The thing's still rather in the fourth-day-of-Creation stage. Anything fresh?"

"Could you get it ready for first experiments by Friday week?"

When quiet had been restored, he said apologetically: "The plane's already been flown down to the rocket site at Llanveryan for trials. Actually it's the Foreign Office that's turning on the steam. The whole affair has become suddenly much more urgent because of unrest in the Sudan. If you can bring it off you'll be a favourite child so far as Harwell is concerned."

When he'd rung off I went into the lab and told Stella about it. She pursed her lips in a soundless whistle.

I said: "We've simply got to throw the thing together. We must have a few days for testing here before it goes out."

"I'll say good-bye to my bed for the next ten days."

"No," I said. "If there's any panic overtime I'll do it alone—or with Dawson."

"D'you mean you're taking me off the job?"

"Heavens, no. I want you to keep hard at it till the whistle blows. And that won't be on Friday week, believe me"

I decided to spend this last rush period at the Old Bull at Letherton. Kent, still staying with the Lloyds, seemed fairly quiet; the house wouldn't go to pot in a week or so, and I could run over every day for the post.

On Sunday, finding my own company just not to be lived with any longer, I rang Simon Heppelwhite, our old friend and Lynn's former employer. He said he was just leaving for the Criterion, where his stage sets for *Volpone* were going up, but if I liked to meet him there he'd be delighted to see me.

When I got in Simon was sitting in the half-lit auditorium, leonine as usual and larger than life. On stage, spotlights were being switched on and off a bit of Venetian Gothic scenery. We talked for a minute or two, and then I told Simon about Lynn. He didn't react much, but sat sideways with his elbow on the back of the seat in front, rubbing his chin on his thumb. "I'm sorry, Michael. Very sorry indeed."

"Did you know about it?"

"Not altogether. But I suspected something. I think you've been wise in not following her. . . . If there *is* a hope of patching this up, I think it lies in leaving her alone to work this out for herself. In my opinion she's behaved like a little fool."

I was surprised at the strong way he put it. "Perhaps Lynn is more sinned against than sinning," I said.

"Oh, nonsense." Simon pulled at his big knitted tie until it came loose. "What woman hasn't been neglected some time in her life because the man is buried in his work? Has it escaped everyone's notice that you've been working for *her?* . . . And isn't she a partner in the firm? Didn't you tell me that?"

"She's got a small stake, yes."

He frowned penetratingly at the stage. "Tell me, Michael, what your own feeling about Lynn is at this moment."

I said: "I think Lynn's a person with a very keen artistic and creative side to her. She'd probably have been much happier with a different sort of man."

"Such as?"

"Well, such as yourself, for instance."

He stood up suddenly and shouted. "No, no, take it off! Take it off!" Some men moved across the stage and he slumped back in his seat. "The idea did cross my mind when I first met her. But it wouldn't have worked. Any other suggestions?"

"Well, Ray French, perhaps."

"Ray? An artist, I agree, and a good one. But very much a man on the make. Anyway, she can't have him; he's engaged."

"I hadn't heard."

"It was in *The Times* recently. Someone called du Caine."

"Oh yes, we met her at Glyndebourne. Anyway, I'm not saying Ray, but someone in that general group."

He said: "Hearing you talk, Michael, it seems to me that Lynn has given you a very serious sense of inferiority. I wonder if Lynn realizes that you're a much rarer bird than she is or her dilettante friends. I know you keep it all well out of sight, but in fact you're an introspective, sensitive brute, with just as many peculiarities as any artist and just as emotionally involved in your work. It's a gift you've got to use, and in your ordinary life allowances have to be made for it."

I said: "I wonder what Lynn's doing with herself now. I wonder who she's with."

We got the scintillometer working by Wednesday morning and on Thursday I phoned Thurston to say that we could at least start to try it out on Friday. I asked Frank Dawson to go with me to the testing site at Llanveryan, expecting that Stella wouldn't be able to make it; but at the last minute she found someone to look after her husband for a couple of nights; so in the end I took them both.

I didn't get a reply from Lynn. Every morning or evening I went over to Greencroft, but there was nothing there. On Wednesday Ray had rung me at the office.

"Hullo, Mike, is Lynn back?"

"Still in London."

"Ah, I thought so. I tried your phone. What's her number?"

"She hasn't got one." I paused. "Oh, I believe we should congratulate you, Ray. When are you getting married?"

"Early next month. In fact that's why I called. We just sent you and Lynn an invitation, but now the date's been brought forward a week. It's fixed for the ninth, a week from Sunday, so we can catch the *Otrantes* for a cruise on the tenth. Mike, it's going to be a very quiet wedding—Margot's shy as a deer—but we hope very much you and Lynn will be able to come."

"Thank you." I hesitated. "If you really want us both it might be a good idea to send separate invitations."

"Oh? . . . I'm sorry if it's that way, Mike. What made you——? But I suppose that isn't my business."

"I didn't. She did."

"Grave mistake on her part. . . . Where do I find her?"

"You can write her." I gave him the bank's address, and rang off.

We left just after eight on Friday morning. Stella and Frank Dawson shared the back seat and the front passenger's seat was occupied by three packages wrapped in blankets which represented most of the headaches of the last few weeks. We were in Brecon at twelve thirty and reached Llanveryan about an hour later.

Llanveryan had been an aerodrome—a glorified landing strip—in the first place, then some of the early guided missiles had been tried out there. Thurston and Steel, the geophysicist, were there to meet us, and another man, Rhodes, who was to be the pilot.

It took the rest of Friday and all Saturday to fit the thing up for the test. We stayed at the hostel at the aerodrome, and there were eight of us altogether, with Stella the only woman. Somehow it wasn't until you got her away from her own surroundings that you realized how attractive she was. Her dress was plain enough, but she drew the eye. Even Thurston—but then I remembered Thurston showing her round at Harwell.

Sunday morning there was fog, but it cleared soon after nine, and at eleven Thurston took off with the pilot, Rhodes, for the first full test. They were going to fly for two hours over picked ground where several radium sources had been placed in various degrees of availability. After the little plane had droned out of sight, Stella and Frank and I walked back towards the hostel.

I said: "If this test makes sense, I shall go home tonight. I've been talking with Thurston about it We can be in phone contact and it's only five hours to get here again."

Screwing up his sardonic face, Frank said "We can't let the factory go to pot. And it soon would with Read in charge."

Stella transferred her eyes to me. There was a look of companionable understanding in their depths.

I said: "Well, he's only had a day and a half of working time to ruin the place."

Frank had a sense of humour over most things, but not over Read. He went off hunching his shoulders. I said: "Dawson's being difficult these days. You'd think he owed me a grudge."

"Has he been with you a long time?" Stella asked.

"Well, yes. In fact, he could have been my partner."

"I don't think he would have done as a partner for you," Stella said.

"Don't you differ altogether in your attitude towards the factory? He wants it to prosper as a factory, but it doesn't awfully matter to him what it's making." She stopped to pick a yellow daisy flowering in a crack in the macadam. "It's not like an ordinary factory at all. It's built round one man. Without you the place would fall to bits in a week."

"You're being very long-sighted this morning."

"No. But an onlooker sometimes——" She smiled.

"Have you, as the onlooker, come to any other interesting conclusions about me and the firm? .. Cough them up."

"When I know you better."

"Don't you know me well yet? You've seen a great deal more of me in the last two months than my own wife has."

Her blue eyes looked beyond me. "D'you count knowing by the quantity of time spent? It's the *quality* of the time, isn't it?"

"And ours has been without quality. Yes, I see that."

She looked a bit startled, uncertain, like someone who hasn't seen a move at chess "Not altogether without quality perhaps but without.... You must know what I mean."

I suppose it was the way I'd phrased things that made the conversation important, that marked the change. Yet there was nothing deliberate about it. The words came that way and the change took place. No doubt it was all only reflecting what had been going on unknown to me for some time, and by chance I let her know it at the same time I realized it myself.

About twelve thirty the fog came down again You could feel the heat of the sun through it and occasionally see a blurred yellow disk. Presently we got in touch with Rhodes on the short-wave radio and after a bit we could hear him circling round. When he got down Thurston was very pleased with the way the surveyor had behaved and we spent the afternoon checking the results.

I thought I'd leave at five thirty, but Thurston said: "I wonder if you could leave one of your people behind in case anything unexpected crops up."

"I don't think for family reasons that Mrs Curtis would want to stay. Will Dawson do?" He nodded. So I left Frank behind.

The fog had nearly cleared when we left about six fifteen. I was

suddenly lighter-hearted than I'd been for weeks. The fact of getting this job satisfactorily done even against the revised delivery date made me realize suddenly how much its failure would have meant to me.

With an hour for a meal somewhere it seemed likely that we should be home before midnight, but after about thirty minutes' driving I blamed myself for not ringing the Automobile Association to see how far the fog persisted It came in patches, blotting everything out, and I had to slow to an absolute crawl. When after a while we came to a sizeable village, I stopped by an hotel.

"I'm going to phone ahead to see what it's like," I said to Stella "It would take us all night to get home at this rate. And on second thoughts it wouldn't be a bad idea to have dinner here, would it?"

We were just going in when I spotted an A A. scout and hailed him. He said: "No, sir, the fog's local, coming in from the sea. I don't think it will get any worse."

I said to Stella · "Shall we eat here? You say."

She nodded. "I'm hungry. But first I'll ring John."

When she joined me in the bar she'd taken off her light coat, combed her hair, and she certainly didn't look like a laboratory assistant. She looked young and composed and lovely, and a stranger, as if I'd never seen her in my life before.

I ordered drinks and asked how her husband was.

"About the same, thank you."

"What exactly is the matter with him?"

"Leukæmia."

"I've heard of it, of course, but I don't know quite——"

"It's a disease of the blood cells."

Her face was clouded and I said rather clumsily: "We're both having a bit of trouble, aren't we?"

"Has anything happened about your wife since you told me?"

"I wrote her but she hasn't so far replied." I turned the stem of my glass. "Just at the moment I'd be glad to forget about it."

"Why now?"

"Reaction. It's getting through with this job. . . . Optimism has been so absent from my life recently that I'd be very happy to let it run as long as it lasts."

We went in to dinner, but after the first few mouthfuls I found I had

no appetite. I can't remember what we talked about, but it certainly wasn't about detector responses. I still kept looking at her as if I were seeing her for the very first time. What made the food have no taste was the realization that she had a good idea of what I felt and didn't seem to care. We stayed longer than we should have over coffee. Now and then a queer tense silence would come down on us, like something stretched and ready to snap. When we got out to the car the fog had gone.

We'd been laughing about something as we got in, but now she sat quietly beside me, her coat folded across her knees. Now and then she gave her head an impatient backward flick, because one dark curl came too low on her forehead. I tried to think of Lynn sitting in that seat as she had done so many hundreds of times, but it didn't help. I only knew at that moment about Stella Curtis.

After a few miles we came to a sign-post marked Brecon, and I hesitated, because this looked like a side road. But Brecon was on our direct route, so I took the road. All was well for a mile or so but then we began to climb, up and up, among the mountains.

The light wasn't fading yet, and here we seemed to be above the fog. Rough wild land stretched up on either side Then we passed a grim granite cottage with a man working in a garden, so I stopped and asked the way. Yes, we were right for Brecon Yes, it was still eleven or twelve miles But the road from here dropped most of the time; soon we should be following the stream.

Three or four miles later, gently dropping all the time, we went down into a bank of fog that you could almost feel. A few hundred yards after that, going slowly but evidently not slowly enough, I ran off the road and split my left front tyre on a stone.

By the time I'd come to the conclusion that, because of the angle of the car, I couldn't get the jack under, I was dirty and hot and the light was failing. "It's obvious," I said, "that you won't be home tonight. There are only three things we can do. We can sit here and hope for a passing car. Or you can stay here while I walk down to Brecon, which must be seven or eight miles. Or you can come with me and hope for a cottage or a farm."

"I'll come with you. I've good shoes, and I don't much fancy staying here on my own."



We set off. After a while I said: "I'm sorry about this."

"It doesn't matter. I'm rather enjoying it. It would be a pity to lose that wave of optimism so soon, wouldn't it? Merely over a fog and a burst tyre."

"Oh, *I'm* not complaining."

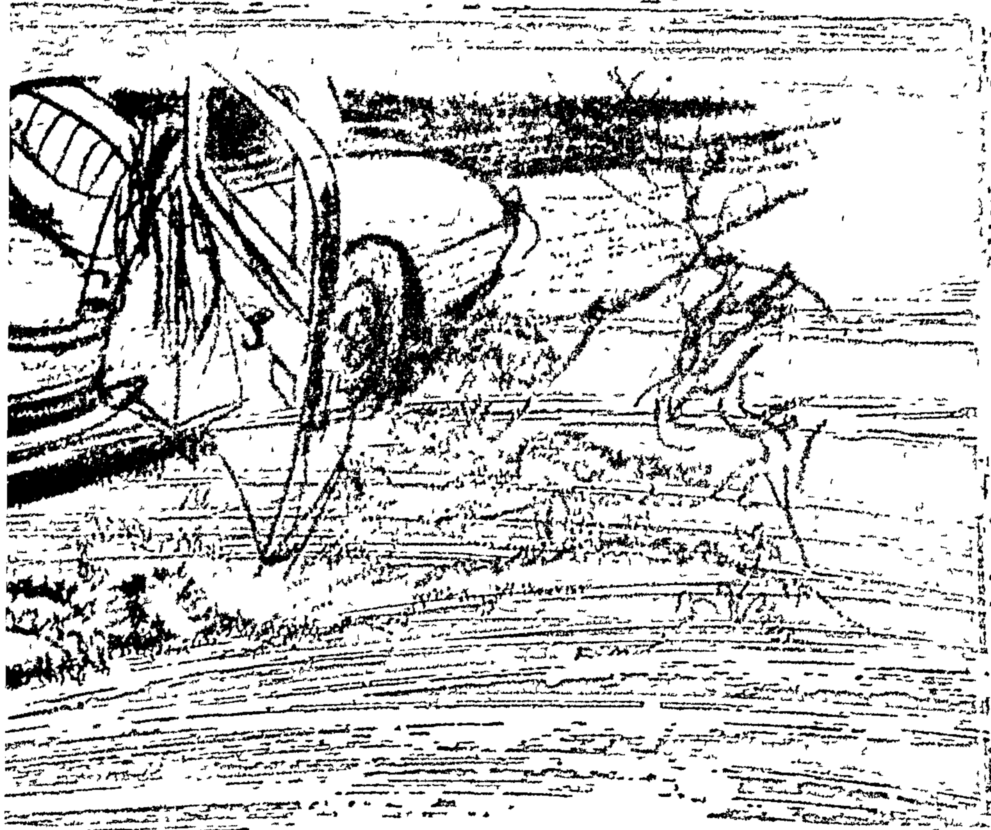
My sentence got extra meaning into it. "Well," she said, "it's not unpleasant walking in the Welsh mountains. It's certainly a change from the scintillometer."

"I've often wondered about you, Stella. Why you went in for this sort of thing. Do you like it—the work, I mean?"

She hesitated. "Not the routine work—that bores me. I like things that have to be tackled and solved."

"It isn't the sort of job one usually associates with a woman. At least, not with one like you."

"Why not with one like me?"



"You ought to know."

She looked at me with grave eyes. "I don't know. I'm sorry."

I said: "Yes you do know. And you're not sorry."

"All right," she said. "If you think that. I'm not sorry."

". . . I wish we were a thousand miles from Brecon."

She didn't speak

I said: "You heard what I said?"

Again there was a pause. Slowly she said, pressing the words out. "Yes, Mike, I heard. But it isn't any good wishing. I don't think that I'm—as free as you are."

It brought a sudden cold turn to the conversation.

"Sorry," I said. "But nobody will ever believe I didn't run into that stone on purpose."

"They will if we get to Brecon."

We walked on for about half a mile. Then I stopped and peered

over a broken stone wall. "There's a stream down there somewhere. I think I'll wash some of this muck off my hands."

I climbed through a gap and through a yard or two of undergrowth. It was one of those Welsh streams that in summer are only a few feet wide. I rinsed my hands, and she came and stood beside me and after a minute crouched and rinsed her own. We stood up together, wiping our hands on a bit of rag I'd had in the car. We smiled at each other, companionable again.

Her eyes went past me and she said: "Isn't that a cottage over there, among those trees?" She was pointing across the stream. The fog had broken and there was certainly some sort of roof showing.

"I'll go and see."

"Wait. I'll come too."

It meant jumping the stream, about four feet wide here, and I was going to help her but she was across before me. On the other side was moorland and then a wall. This time I was over first and put a hand up to help her down. She took it. Our hands were cold after the water. Then she was down and was against me. We looked at each other and I kissed her.

It was a pretty ordinary thing to happen, no doubt, and hardly unexpected after the way we'd been talking. So perhaps I was a fool for feeling the way I did. I felt as if I'd been flying too high in an unpressurized plane.

Afterwards she leaned against the wall and brushed her hair back with a slow forearm. Then she looked at me with a sort of pallor in her face, and went on through some thickets. We came to a hedge and found a gap and there stopped. We'd come on a high building of some description, but it certainly wasn't a cottage.

"It looks like a chapel," she said.

"There must be a village near here, then."

We went round the high blank wall. At the front you could see that her guess about the chapel had been right. But grass sprouted between the steps, and brambles lay across the path. I went up to the door, turned the handle and went in. The light was almost gone now, but you could see that the place had been stripped, and at the other end the roof had fallen.

"I shouldn't think this has been used for forty years," I said. I took

out a pocket torch that I always carried in the car and shone it round. I flickered it near enough to Stella to see her face; then I put out the light and moved back to the door. There I stopped. "Stella."

"No, Mike."

But her voice wasn't sure. Somehow we got out into the gathering dusk; I don't remember how.

She said: "Let's get back to the road."

We veered back in search of the stream and soon found it. Here it was a trifle wider than where we'd crossed it first. We jumped together but she didn't quite make it. One foot slipped. I pulled her out quickly and she sat on the bank. "Hurt?"

"No, only wet." She took off one red shoe and emptied the water out. I sat and looked at her. "Mike, you frighten me," she said without in the least changing her tone.

"I might say the same of you."

"Oh! . . ."

"But it's true. It's true."

We stopped talking for a moment, rather suddenly, faced with an almost overwhelming sense of being on the edge of things.

I said painstakingly "It's queer how this has happened."

"Mike . . . ."

I said: "I'm as shaky as a man with a match in a gunpowder room."

"Put the match out."

"There isn't any way."

"Except getting out of this fog." She began to put on her shoe, and then said in a lost voice: "Don't suppose all the explosives are on your side."

"I don't—I didn't—I won't."

She tied the lace, her slight fingers getting in each other's way. I got up. "For goodness' sake, let's go."

We started off at right angles to the stream, expecting the road in fifty yards, but the rough, empty moorland went on. Then we came to the stream again, barring our path.

I said: "If we're not careful we shall be lost."

"I think we are now."

I shone my light about, but the beam only reflected drifting mist. The fog had come down with the dark.

"If we follow the stream," I said, "we're surely going in the right direction."

"But will it lead us back to the road? We've already come downstream."

We tossed for it and downstream won. Presently we came on the remains of a railway line. It was no more than a flattened track, with one or two sleepers deeply buried in brambles. Beside the old track there was another building like a railwayman's hut, but quite a size. The door was half off its hinges but I shoved it open. This hadn't the dank unhealthy taint of the chapel; there was a fire-place in one wall, a broken lantern on a nail, a chair without legs and a rusty frying-pan.

I said to her: "Stop or go on?"

She said: "Go on."

We followed the track again for a couple of hundred yards. Then it branched, and neither branch looked less overgrown than the other.

"We're lost," she said.

"What now?"

"Go back, I suppose."

As we came to the hut I said: "We'd better stay here for a bit until it clears. It may lift soon."

It was too dark now to see her face clearly, but her eyes glimmered with what seemed to be their own light. "It isn't *fair,* Mike, it isn't fair."

I said: "I know I'm deeply sorry, and yet glad."

Her hand seemed to want to get away from mine, but I held it firmly.

"Perhaps we can get a fire going," I said. "There's the chair we can burn."

On the threshold of the hut she still hesitated. Then she went slowly in. After a few seconds I followed her and closed the door behind us.

CHAPTER 3

I GOT to the works the next day about two.

Read came in full of curiosity to know how we'd got on, and when he heard Dawson had stayed behind he said: "I expect they couldn't resist his fatal charm. And Mrs. Curtis?"

"I brought her home. We got befogged and had to spend the night at Brecon. I suppose Thurston hasn't rung?"

"No."

When he had gone I tried to take myself in hand. I'd thought, when I got into the office, yesterday would have to take second place But it wouldn't. All sorts of things had changed for me since yesterday. All right, I said to myself, you're in love. Why make a thing about it? It's not the first time. What about Lynn?

And there I struck the rocks. Because it was the first time, this way. Yes, I'd been in love with Lynn. I remembered my early feelings for her. But they were different from these. Or was this only the second or third of the fifty-seven varieties of love?

No, precisely no, because last night, important though it was, was not the whole of it, perhaps not even the half of it Lynn was my wife and I was tied to her by many ties. But they didn't affect or even touch what had come from yesterday. I wasn't cheapening the word by saying I was in love with Stella, I was giving it a new dimension.

For the rest of the day I tried to pick up some of the loose ends that had been dropped. In the evening I knew I ought to drive over to Greencroft to see if there was any letter yet from Lynn, but I spent the night at the hotel in Letherton instead.

The next morning Stella was not at the factory. I stuck it until twelve and then decided to go round and see her, even though I didn't like the thought of meeting John Curtis again

Just as I was thinking up an excuse for going, Thurston arrived, on his way back to Harwell. "I left early this morning," he explained.

"Why have you come this far out of your way?" I said. "Trouble?"

"In a way, yes. Certain criticisms of the instrument have been put forward, chiefly by Steel" He plucked at his bottom lip. "It does seem to me that he's raising more objections than are reasonably justifiable."

"What does he complain about?"

"Chiefly the lack of a radio-altimeter."

I said. "It means extra weight and a lot of elaboration. Just what we've tried to avoid."

"I know."

We talked for about twenty minutes As he got up to go I said. "You want Dawson to stay down there at present?"

"If you can spare him. It might save you or Mrs. Curtis another journey."

Mrs. Curtis. Mike, Mike, she'd said my name over and over again on Sunday night.

"I called in to see them on the way here," Thurston said, making for the door. "It seemed a suitable thing to do."

"Yes," I said, walking with him to the dilapidated car he drove. Then: "Who did you say you'd been to see?"

"The Curtises. I'd only met him twice before, but one likes to pay one's respects."

"What, to Mr. Curtis?"

"To Dr. Curtis, yes."

"I don't quite get you."

Thurston looked at me. "Well, it's a pretty big loss, that, while he's still at the height of his powers."

"I don't follow you, David."

He put in the ignition key. "You must know who he is."

I said: "I don't know anything. You mean he's a scientist?"

"Was. One of our ablest. Curtis of the Cavendish Laboratories. I suppose you remember his paper before the Royal Society on 'The Unity of Radiation and Matter'? It's still definitive."

I said. "Why the blazes didn't somebody *tell* me?"

Thurston shrugged. "I naturally thought his wife had."

"She didn't. Did she tell you?"

"No, but when you brought her to Harwell, we had to have her screened, so naturally we knew."

"Was that why you made such a fuss over her?"

He looked at me. "I don't know that I made 'a fuss' over her. Obviously one tries to offer some courtesy to the wife of a distinguished man who has been struck down as he has."

"Wait," I said as he reached for the starter. "Tell me more about his illness."

Thurston stopped. "We're usually much too cunning nowadays to risk our lives monkeying about without adequate protection. There aren't gamma-ray martyrs dotted about the country the way there used to be with X-rays. At least, not yet! But now and then someone slips up. John Curtis slipped up—or that's the general opinion." He started the engine "I was surprised to see him still out of bed."

"Still?" I said. "D'you mean already out of bed?"

"No, still. He's been ill six or seven months now. I understand he is not likely to last beyond the end of this year."

After lunch I got in my car and drove to the Curtises'. I thought if I didn't go straight away I shouldn't go at all.

When I got there a nurse opened the door.

"That you, Granville?" came Curtis's voice from the sitting-room. "Come in, will you?"

There was no escape then. He was in a dressing-gown and looked like a ghost. "Sit down," he said, waving the end of an unlighted pipe. "Stella's out shopping. It was good of you to give her an extra day off."

I thought: J. N. Curtis, of course. He'd been on the War Research Council. Younger then. Younger than I was now.

"Smoke?"

"Thanks," I said.

"We've had another visitor today—David Thurston."

"He told me he'd called. I didn't know you knew each other."

"Very little."

He began to light his pipe. Groping for words, I said: "I've got to tell you that Stella never told me who you were. I hadn't the ghost of an idea until Thurston told me this afternoon."

"It's my fault Stella doesn't tell people. The fewer who know . . . ."

"But I don't mean merely your identity——" I stopped.

"My illness? Well, one goes with the other, doesn't it?"

I got up to knock my ash off, and stayed up. "These last few minutes I've tried to see myself in your place. . . . This thing you've got—what can be done about it?"

"One makes one's will. One loses one's fear of growing old."

"Because of doing things with radio-active materials?"

He shook his head. "I took a few chances."

I walked up and down once. "What astonishes me—what I can't understand is your being the way you are and holding the views you do. About religion, I mean."

"I don't see the connection."

"You make me feel very small. . . ."

He had been watching me. Now he said: "What I was trying to say the other night is this. D'you mind? . . ."

"No."

He said: "Science, I suppose you'd say, begins with observed facts systematically classified Right? Well, there is one fact about man that has distinguished him from his first appearance on the earth. It marks him as different from all other creatures. That is, he's a worshipping animal. That's not a pious conclusion; it's an observed fact. And all through pre-history and recorded history, when he's deprived himself of worship he's gone to pieces. Many people nowadays are going to pieces." He stopped. "Sorry. When I talk too much I lose my breath."

I waited.

"Well, I've no cure-all to suggest," he went on. "The ordinary man has to work his own way through. But I am concerned about scientists like you, Mike, the crowned heads of the future, whose hands are going to hold so much power. As I see it, science can't emancipate man from his own nature; it can only help him to understand it. In times of crisis, if a man has no reference outside himself, even his best moral judgments straggle off. If you lose your sense of wonder, you lose your sense of balance."

I glanced up and saw that Stella had come into the hall.

Meeting her again was deadly with him there. And his being there was now so much worse than I'd ever reckoned on. Somehow we got through it. She was pale but quite in hand.

We talked about general things. John Curtis wanted me to stay to tea but I made an excuse and left, and Stella walked with me to the gate.

"Stella," I said. "I didn't know who John was."

"He likes to be close about it."

I struggled with thoughts. "It can't change what I feel about you. But it very much shakes up the way I feel about myself."

"I'm not very prideful either," she said.

I stopped, fingering a branch of a cherry tree. "Hearing what I've heard today, Stella, makes me feel—rather like an assassin."

She stared across the garden rather blindly. "You haven't killed him. Life's killed him. Seeing Harwell that time, even though John hadn't worked there—that's why I was nearly a casualty in the car afterwards."

We went on to the gate.

I said: "I must see you soon."

"I shall come tomorrow as usual. But I shall have to leave."

"Why?"

"We can't go on after last Sunday."

Desperately I said: "He'll want to know why."

"I'll tell him I'm tired, want a break."

I said: "Stella, when things happen as they happened on Sunday, you don't add it up at the time. But obviously . . . I want very much to know . . . ."

"If I love him?" she said recklessly. "Yes, I love him. It doesn't make Sunday any more admirable, does it?"

"I don't know. I don't know."

She shook her head. "There's something I feel I've got to say—even if you don't much like it, Mike." She looked at me. "Ever since Sunday I've been thinking, trying to see it from a distance. And in a way it seems to me—how can I put it? . . . What happened happened more easily because I have been in love with John. If you've been happy with love you have less defence against it."

There was a long silence.

I said: "Stella, you've tried to tell me how Sunday looks to you. It isn't even necessary to tell you how it looks to me. I love you I'd double the stakes. And double them again."

In the sunlight her narrowed eyes had unusual lights and depths She smiled at me, not happily, but with a glance of heightened sensibility. Then she turned away without saying what I hoped she might say but knew at heart she could not.

At the end of the day I went over to Greencroft.

There was still no letter from Lynn. The house was cold in spite of the weather, and in the drawing-room everything seemed dusty to the touch I opened the gramophone and saw there were some records still on the turn-table but I hadn't the interest to run them through I tried the TV set and stared for a few minutes at a dull play. I wasn't staying here tonight, but felt I ought to see Mrs. Lloyd to see how Kent was going on. Then it occurred to me to wonder if Lynn had picked up her key.

I opened the front door and looked. The key was still there. After a minute I realized that somebody was standing in the drive.

It was a middle-aged, loose-jointed man in a shiny blue suit and a hat with a warped brim.

"Mr. Granville?"

"Yes?"

"Mr. Michael Henry Granville?"

I said I couldn't deny it.

"Then, sir, it's my duty to serve you with this petition." He put an envelope into my hand. "Good evening to you, sir."

He went off down the drive. I looked at the long envelope, and then stared after him until he disappeared. I opened the thing.

It was a petition filed by my wife. She claimed a divorce on the ground of my misconduct with Mrs. Stella Vivien Curtis, of Letherton, Essex.

GROSVENOR COURT MEWS, the address Lynn's mother had given me, was one of those quiet backwaters that you find in the Mayfair district of London: a rectangle of cobbled and paved yard, two or three tiny houses, and a few garages with flats over them.

Number 9a was one of the flats. I went upstairs and rang the bell. No answer.

At a branch in the stairs just below was a door marked 9, so I went down and put a finger on that bell. After a bit the door was opened by an elderly, spectacled woman.

I said: "I beg your pardon. Does Mrs. Granville live here?"

"No, she lives at 9a, at the top of the stairs, but she's not at home." The voice wasn't a bit friendly.

"Do you know when she'll be back?"

The woman shook her head. "No idea at all. She's changed her habits these last weeks."

I said suddenly: "These last *weeks?* But surely Mrs. Granville has only had this flat a very short time?"

"Not by my way of reckoning. She's had it since March Quarter Day, and she rents it from me."

I stared at her. She'd already turned away, and the door was closing. I said: "Do you happen to remember when Mrs. Granville was here last?"

"Remember? No, I don't. I don't keep watch on my tenants."

"No, of course not——"

"She was upstairs last Thursday night, but she came in so late I didn't see her. She's always here Thursdays to pay the rent. She a friend of yours?"

I hesitated. "Yes."

It was the wrong answer. "Well, then, you'll know."

I said: "Does she usually come in late on Thursdays?"

She closed the door another inch. "Yes. Too late. That is, since the time when she used to be here in the afternoons. I've got to go now. My kettle's boiling."

"Thank you for helping," I said, "Mrs.—er——"

"Miss," she said "Miss Lord." And shut the door.

THE LAWYERS' offices looked as if they had survived the Great Fire of 1666. I put the paper on the counter in front of a girl with red-gold hair, who was not of the same vintage "This petition has been served on me by your firm. I'd like an interview with whichever of your principals was concerned in issuing it."

"Would you mind waiting, sir?"

I waited It felt about an hour before I was shown in to see a Mr. Shelley. Mr. Shelley was a fat man with eyes almost closed and huge pouches under them like ladies' handbags

I handed him the petition. "You are acting for my wife in this?"

"We are."

"So she approves of this very strange document?"

He opened his eyes sufficiently to look at his finger-nails. "Frankly, Mr. Granville, I'm not really in order in seeing you at all But I thought as you had called perhaps there was some specific point. . . . Obviously, I can't discuss the nature of the evidence with you. You should go to your own solicitor."

"Would you tell me one thing?"

"If I can."

"How long have you been having me watched?"

He put on a pair of spectacles and turned the petition round. "The first evidence is on May the twenty-sixth. It's all I can tell you."

"I suppose this petition can still be withdrawn?"

"Er—yes. It can be withdrawn at the instance of your wife." He pushed himself slowly out of his chair and walked ponderously across

the room. "Naturally, the courts are always glad to encourage reconciliation. But if I may advise you on one thing, I should go and consult a solicitor first. Put all the facts before him and then do what he suggests."

WHITEHOUSE, of Tranter, Page and Whitehouse, was a big blond man in his early forties. I handed him the petition and when he'd finished reading it he flipped the thing with his finger and glanced at me. "What's the answer? A denial?"

"Complete. The whole thing is nonsense."

He drew a pad towards him and, tearing off a half-scribbled sheet, began to make hieroglyphics on the new one.

"With a charge of this kind the actual occasions need not be specified on the petition. 'And on numerous other occasions between May twenty-seventh and July thirteenth.' Can you remember what you were doing on those dates?"

"For the last two months I've been working very hard, so that one day has been much like another. My secretary might help."

"This—er—Mrs. Curtis, who is in your laboratory—you were with her on those dates?"

"Probably. We were on a rush job and it meant long hours together. Often we worked late—and twice we had dinner sent in and went on afterwards, once until midnight."

He questioned me at considerable length. Finally he put his pencil down and shook his head. "Obviously, Mr. Granville, you could have been carrying on a fine affair with the young lady for all one can tell to the contrary. Opportunity has existed in plenty. But evidence of opportunity alone is not sufficient to get a divorce. There must reasonably be some evidence to show infatuation or undue familiarity." He paused. "If a woman came to me with no more evidence than this, I should tell her that she hadn't grounds for a divorce."

I thought it out. "This firm who are acting for her . . . ."

"Yes, it's a point." He made a face. "They're not tip-top. I'll make some inquiries about them."

I got up. "This suit's complicated for me in another way, too." I hesitated. "Mrs. Curtis's husband is a very sick man. I'm not certain if you'll have heard of John Curtis, but he's well known in the scientific

world To me he's—one of the exalted few. He's very devoted to his wife, has complete trust in her. There isn't much I wouldn't do to avoid poisoning his thoughts of his wife "

"That may be difficult, Mr. Granville."

"Why?"

"Well, in all probability by now his wife will have been served with a petition herself "

When I got to the works about four, Bill Read had the usual problems to be solved.

I said. "Has Mrs. Curtis come today?"

"Yes. She's in the model shop, I think."

I breathed again.

"There's one other thing, Mr. Granville. A rumour's going round that McGowrie is a Communist."

"Who?"

"The red-headed chap we've had about a fortnight The people working next to him are complaining. They say he makes no secret of it "

"You'd better have him screened," I said. "Put a call through to London at once And Bill . . . I want a session with Mrs Curtis at once, so let me know the answer later on, will you?"

"Right."

When he had gone I pressed the speaker and said to Miss Allen "I want Mrs Curtis, please, and will you keep all phone calls out." It was almost office teatime, so I added, "And no tea till I ring "

Stella came in. She didn't look well this afternoon. But I knew the instant I saw her. It was a recognition of loving someone as involuntary as a reflex action. I got her a chair I could tell by her manner that she hadn't yet had the petition, but I just couldn't go right to the point in the first second of meeting.

"How have things gone with you?"

"I'm all right "

"And John?"

"I told him I was leaving here. He didn't altogether approve. He thinks this work keeps me occupied. He likes you, you know "

Silence fell for a minute or so I picked up a pencil and began to dab it at the desk. Then I said "Stella, I've got to tell you that something

has turned up, something quite fantastic, and I honestly don't know how to begin."

She looked at me. "About Lynn?"

"Yes. She's petitioning for divorce. . . ."

I took the petition out and handed it to her.

While her colour was coming back I told her quietly what I'd done so far. She said: "But the whole thing, as it's put down here . . . ."

"I know. A hatch of lies. Up to the time the petition speaks of—up to the thirteenth of July—I'd hardly consciously thought of you as a woman at all. The fact that since that time we've made the substance of the case true doesn't compel us to admit what didn't happen "

"I'm thinking of John."

"So am I. But I don't feel a sham in denying this bogus stuff, Stella The point is to stop it before it gets anywhere."

"Through Lynn?"

"Yes, through her, when I find her." There was silence for a while. I said "If it were not for John I wouldn't want to fight this at all."

Stella gave a little shiver. "Mike, why has Lynn brought this petition? It's such a back-door way out "

I said. "I'm coming to the conclusion I never really understood her. It's a pretty unpleasant reflection on the quality of my married life."

"It doesn't follow that the fault has been yours."

"If you can live with a woman for three years and know as little about her as I apparently know about Lynn, then you can't be very intelligent—and it can't make your expression of love for another woman very much to be prized."

"That rather depends on the woman."

When she had gone I asked Miss Allen for my works diary. May 27, which was the first date on the petition, was the day of our visit to Harwell when I had called back at our house for the I.D.A. plans for Frank Dawson July 13 was the night I'd worked with Stella at the factory until after midnight.

Just then Read came in and said: "Well, they've checked and wasted no time on it. McGowrie is an active member of the Communist Party. He's working for us on a radar job that's fairly advanced but it's not exactly on the secret list. What do we do now?"

"Get him out. Reorganize the working arrangements and create a duplication."

He hesitated. "It won't be easy when we're so understaffed."

"Make the best excuse you can. Security won't want him here a minute longer than necessary."

Just before it was time to break off I went into the factory. As usual the main workshop had a rather echoing quietness about it, with people sitting and standing at their benches, but in the background was the muffled throbbing from the machine shop. It seemed as if I hadn't been in the place for weeks. It wasn't the night for overtime—we did that only twice a week; so most of the work-people were now quietly ending the day. I stopped and had a word with one or two of those on new work.

After most of the men had left, I picked up Stella and drove her home. We didn't speak for a time. She was sitting very much in her corner as if avoiding me. All it seemed to do was make me more aware of every movement and breath she took.

I said: "If you can talk about it, how did you first meet John?"

"He came over to see my chief at Oxford. We were carrying out some experiments he was interested in. We exchanged a few words, and the next day he wrote inviting me out to dinner."

"He's much older than you?"

"Nineteen years. He was married before, but his wife died. He has a son studying law in Canada. . . . It's hard for you, who didn't know him, to imagine what he was like even twelve months ago."

"You were happy."

"Yes—we were happy." She sighed deeply, with a catch in her breath. "Oh, Mike, this is a mess, isn't it? If you're a long way from shore, how do you think I'm going on?"

"That's what I'm rather anxious about."

We stopped at the cottage gate. "Can you come in just for a minute?"

I saw it was going to help her, so I followed her in. John Curtis was down again and looking not quite so emaciated.

"Hullo, darling." She kissed him. "I brought Mike back for two minutes but he can't stay. You all right?"

"Better. Employ your two minutes in a drink, Mike. You're in good time tonight, my dear."

"Yes." She took off her jacket, and I watched the slip and flow of her young body as she dropped the coat away from her. "Mike's getting indulgent."

John raised his eyebrows. "He looks worried. Don't say the scintillometer is getting you down at this stage."

I didn't reply.

"I wondered——" John stopped "Oh, I forgot to tell you, Stella, there's a registered envelope for you on the bookcase. It came this morning just after you'd left."

He went on talking and I watched her go slowly across to it. I watched with the fascination of someone in a nightmare as she picked it up.

Her finger went under the flap and broke the seal. As she began to take out the paper I butted in "John, I *am* worried, and for a special reason. I've got something to tell you, and that's why I came in this evening."

He was watching me with his alert eyes Stella held the papers in her hand

In a cold sweat I said · "You knew my wife had left me, didn't you?"

"Stella said something about it "

"Lynn made it fairly plain she was tired of the way we lived, and three weeks ago she left. That, I thought, was all. Today—or rather last night—I had a nasty shock. I discovered that she has been having me watched for nearly three months She's had a divorce petition served on me. It absolutely floored me when it came. And the name of the woman she cites in this petition as having been—as the woman . . . ."

I saw his eyes change He looked at Stella "Not you?"

Her head came up and she looked back at him, not flinching or moving at all. Before she could speak I said. "Yes I'll never forgive Lynn for this. Of course, it's a completely phoney, trumped-up charge—as I don't think I need to tell you."

After a second or so he glanced down, looked for his pipe and found it on the table beside him.

"No," he said. "I don't think you need to tell me."

There was a crackle of the paper as Stella began to unfold the petition.

"I can't say what this does to me, to bring this extra trouble on you both When I do find her, I'll move heaven and earth to get her to play

this thing straight. If she wants to be the innocent party in the divorce, then I'll give her material for a divorce, but not this way."

After that nobody spoke for a bit.

Stella put the papers down in front of John He made no move to look at them. She said to him· "You know, there *isn't* a word of truth in this paper, darling."

He looked up at her and smiled. "Have I looked as if I thought there was?"

"So far you've only heard it from Mike I wanted you to hear it from me."

He patted her hand. "If I didn't trust you, I shouldn't trust myself"

Presently Stella went out of the room, and John asked me some questions about Lynn. I said abruptly: "I've never been more conscious than I am at this moment of the complete crack-up of everything in my life."

"If, as you say, you were fond of her——"

"No, it isn't just that . . . I should have *known* I feel that I've been too damned obtuse to have a notion of what she's been feeling and



thinking for months. For that and for other reasons I find it quite hard to live with myself. Everything I've *done,* it seems to me, bears out your judgment of the type of man you told me I was—fumbling along, restricted by a narrow technical view of life——"

"Sit down," he said, "and don't talk rot."

"It makes good sense to me at the moment. But I still don't quite see your solution to life as the solution for me."

"My solution? You mean having some belief in the spiritual dignity of man? I don't know that it's a hold-all for everybody's perplexities. I don't find it much more than adequate at times."

"But adequate."

There was a silence. I said: "You've taken this petition, this—this eruption on your private life—without a complaint, without a question. I'm—more than grateful to you for that"

"Well . . . we're all in the mess together, aren't we?"

"Thank you for saying so"

"Shut the window, will you, Mike? The evening's turning chilly. . . . You'll stay to supper?"

"I'd like to."

WHEN I LEFT, which I did about nine, I drove into London to see Lynn's mother But she didn't seem able to help me The few hints and addresses I got smelled unlikely. I booked a room at an hotel in Piccadilly, garaged my car, and walked up to Grosvenor Court Mews. It was almost midnight and there was a light in Miss Lord's flat but none in the two windows of Number 9a.

I waited a long time. A policeman glanced at me a couple of times but didn't tell me to move on. At two I went back to the hotel Evidently Lynn wasn't coming tonight. But tonight was Wednesday. Miss Lord said it was Thursdays she came to pay her rent.

By lunch-time next day, having drawn blank on the trails Lynn's mother had given me, I rang the works from London, and found that Frank Dawson was back from Llanveryan.

He said: "Only here for the day, Mike. Is it all right for me to go back to Wales tomorrow?"

"Yes, that's okay."

"You'll be in at the works today?"

Something in his voice. "I'm not sure. Why?"

"Well, Read's having a bit of trouble. Apparently he's sacked one of the electricians, and there's a hoo-ha because he's a Communist."

"We checked up. I told Read to get rid of him. But I presume nobody's been fool enough to say why."

"Maybe Read's been incautious. Anyway, it's got out and some of the men are pretty het-up."

I said: "Put me on to Read."

It took a few seconds and then I heard Read's voice "Hullo, Mr. Granville. Afraid it's true. It may all blow over, but it's this silly principle of no victimization for political opinions. One or two of the fellows are looking ugly."

"How the devil did it get out?"

"It didn't so far as I know. McGowrie himself took it quite well. I had him in and he said, 'Is it because I'm a Communist?' and I looked surprised and said, 'Not at all.' Then he went off and I heard nothing until about an hour ago, when one or two hot-heads began buzzing."

I thought a minute. "Look, Read, take it easy. Let the thing ride if you can, and don't make an issue of it."

"Right. But McGowrie must go?"

"Well, yes, there's no other way, is there?"

"Will you be in today?"

"I'm not sure. I'll try."

Part of the afternoon I spent with Whitehouse again. Once the machinery had been put in motion, there was no real urgency from a legal point of view. Feeling better, I came out and got in my car. Tonight being Thursday, there was an obvious date to be kept with Lynn at Number 9a Grosvenor Court Mews. But that would come later. It was now half past four.

The fine weather of the last two weeks was breaking up, and heavy yellow clouds hung over the city. One or two spots of rain fell on the bonnet. I thought, If the electricians go out on strike at this particular stage and the Harwell thing is shot down by Steel, as Thurston fears . . . . In spite of high hopes my financial position was finely balanced. I had a very heavy mortgage on the new factory. If everything was brought to a standstill there it would probably never restart.

But it would take more than an hour to get to Letherton at this time

of the day. By six everyone at the plant would be gone. Better to go straight home to Hockbridge, pick up letters, then go on to Letherton and call on Stella and John. I had promised I would, and she could tell me what was happening at the works. I realized that the need to see Stella, great as it had been all week, was each day an increasing one. Life wasn't going to be made any easier by that fact. We had to stop seeing each other. There was no other way.

I DROVE down to Hockbridge.

Because of being served with the petition, I hadn't called on Mrs. Lloyd on Tuesday, so I went there first. Kent greeted me with even more than his usual affection, knocking over a stool to get at me and nearly putting me on my back.

Mrs. Lloyd said she'd be glad to know when Mrs. Granville was coming back, because she didn't like being paid for nothing and she didn't have a key and the house would be getting dirty and neglected. And Mr. Lloyd was awfully fond of Kent but said he was much too big for their cottage.

I was fairly sure by now that Mrs Lloyd had a good idea what was going on, even if she hadn't known from the start. I told her I'd make other arrangements about Kent within a week and in the meantime she wasn't to worry about the house.

I took Kent up to Greencroft with me, as he looked as if he needed exercise, and he bounded ahead in an ungainly gallop, his white tail dipping madly.

The sky was still heavy, and the house was dark when I went in. There were some letters. Taking them into the living-room to read, I opened the french windows and stood on the top step looking out over the garden. Nothing in Lynn's writing. A surtax demand I hadn't expected, the electricity bill, and a postcard for Lynn from some people in the South of France. That was the lot. She was evidently going to play out this farce to the bitter end.

There was a flicker of lightning over the trees, and I waited for the rumble of thunder. It came at last, very distant. I wondered what had happened to Kent, and then heard him in the hall. When another flicker of lightning came, remembering that Kent was inclined to be frightened by storms, I went to find him.

He wasn't in the hall, but in the short dark passage to the kitchen. Here a door led down to the cellar, and he was scratching at that. I wondered if he was trying to get away from the storm, so I opened the door and he immediately scuttled in.

I went into the kitchen and wondered why kitchens always come to look neglected quicker than any other room in the house. I was going into the larder, but heard Kent barking excitedly, so I went back to the cellar steps.

There was only one main cellar really, a square room we used for junk, with two smaller places leading off, one for wine and one for coal. I switched on the light and went down.

Kent was in the coal cellar, scratching at the anthracite, ears cocked and tail wagging in brief, interested bursts. Unfortunately the only light was the one in the main cellar, and it was shadowy and dark where he was scratching at the great pile. The small stuff was constantly rattling as he brought it rolling down. I saw he'd got something greyish almost under his paws, but it seemed to be part of a longer thing becoming outlined as the coal rolled away.

I said sharply: "Come away. Come away, Kent."

At the tone of my voice he stopped, head on one side. Suddenly I kicked at him, and he jumped away. Still uncertain, I went a step closer. Then I bent and caught hold of the thing he had unearthed.

It was a hand and arm. I started back with a gulp that choked me. Doing so, I thrust away a pile of anthracite, and all the surface began to move. Like a black tide it rattled down, partly covering the hand and arm but revealing a face and head It was almost unrecognizable, but I had no difficulty in spotting a single turquoise ear-ring.

I had found Lynn at last.

CHAPTER 4

I WAS on the kitchen floor. I didn't know how long I'd been lying there. I remembered vaguely crawling on all fours nightmarish out of the dark pit, with fright and sickness clutching at me. The floor of the kitchen was stone, and the cold stone must have gradually brought me round.

Kent was barking delightedly as though this were some sort of a new

game. He was a heavy dog, but the shove I gave him sent him slithering across the kitchen floor, puzzled, subdued I got to the sink then and was really sick I turned on the cold tap and with trembling hands splashed water over my head and neck. After a bit the awful throbbing in my throat seemed to quiet down. Straightening up, I lurched out of the kitchen and reached the drawing-room. The french windows were still open, and another flicker of lightning moved behind the trees.

I got as far as the cabinet and took out the brandy, couldn't see a glass, gulped three or four times at the bottle. I flopped in a chair and lay there for a long time meeting the horror that kept getting at me. I was now just one step away from complete break-up, but I couldn't get any farther.

The light in the room was queer, a false twilight because of the thunder-clouds There were still a couple of hours of day left, but I couldn't shake free from the idea that the light was fading. I knew I couldn't be alone there in the dark.

Then the telephone at my elbow rang. I took another gulp of brandy before I lifted it off.

"Hullo "

"Oh, Mike, this is Frank Dawson. A bit of luck catching you. Thought I'd try the number to see if you were there."

"Yes." Tell *him?* Ask *him* to get help?

"I thought you'd want to know the latest about the works dispute. The electricians have called a strike for tomorrow."

"Oh."

"Hullo. . . . I say they've called a strike for tomorrow."

"Yes."

"I think Read has mismanaged the thing from the start."

Lynn's dead, Frank, I would say. *I've just found her In this house, in the cellar Somebody's killed her.*

"Are you all right?"

What, Lynn dead? Incredulous, he would be; incredulous, suspicious, staring.

"What?'

"I say, are you all right?"

"Yes. . . . I'm . . ."

"I thought you sounded a bit queer. Is Lynn at home?"

Is she at home? I said · "*Why?*"

"I just thought I'd like to hear the sound of her voice."

I glanced round. "No, she's not at home."

And then he rang off. The chance was gone. I suddenly felt that by saying nothing to him I'd done something irrevocable. Yet far better to get help direct Fumble a cigarette out of the box. Light it. Take up the telephone again.

And then again I put it back. The thought of Frank, incredulous, unbelieving . . . . Other people would be just as incredulous. Among them the police What would *you* think if you were a policeman? Go slow.

I knew I'd got to think, and think more clearly than ever before in my life. But not in this house. I couldn't stay in here because, if I did, not one straight thought would come. Not while that lay in the coal cellar.

I went out of the french windows into the garden, and away at the end of the lawn I sank down on a tree stump.

Someone had killed Lynn. But who? I was her husband. We'd not been getting on She'd decided to divorce me, had cited another woman; I'd been furious, had wanted to stop the divorce. She'd refused; we'd quarrelled violently.

That was the lay-out.

A car went past on the road that Lynn had used on the Friday night when she'd come back to fetch something. I'd run across this grass after her. She'd lost one ear-ring. Three weeks ago tomorrow Why had she come back that night and when had she come back for the last time?

Who had last seen her? On Saturday or Sunday after leaving me she'd replied to the bank's letter. Miss Lord had had the rent of her flat only six days ago But she hadn't seen her. For that matter, neither had the bank seen her.

I looked back at the house; it was dark and square-shouldered and baleful against the trees. I needed more brandy, but that was in the house. Not the courage to go back yet Steady, think it over. Not to call the police could be as big a bloomer as to call them—probably much greater. A flash of lightning lit the sky, and I waited for the thunder. This time it never came. A spot of rain was cold on my hand.

It wasn't really any use trying to reason clearly even out here. Every

now and then I'd think things were beginning to settle; but still nothing took shape.

The rain came faster. Must go back to the house. At this moment I had one advantage over everyone else. I only—apart from the murderer—knew I hadn't killed my wife. If the police were called in they'd automatically make me chief suspect. Could I turn this advantage to any gain before I reported the body? I thought, If I don't tell the police, can I go about the ordinary business of living—even for a few hours?

Reason it out. Lynn had been dead some time. . . . Who then went to her flat in Grosvenor Court Mews late at night? Today was Thursday. Someone came on Thursdays late to pay the rent. Presumably they slipped the money in an envelope into Miss Lord's letter-box. How could anyone risk going to the flat unless he knew Lynn was dead?

I went back to the house.

Kent was quiet. I went upstairs. It was queer, feeling that going away from the doors of the house was moving away from safety. If something followed up the stairs retreat was cut off. I went into our bedroom, put on the light, went to her dressing-table and began to search through the drawers.

The scent she used came from her things, and suddenly I had to stop because tears were running down my face. I sat there miserably for a time, not able to go on. And as I sat there my fear gave way to pity and anger. No doubt it was true that Lynn hadn't much liking for me before the end; but that didn't change what I felt and had felt about her.

Finally I went back to the dressing-table. A few old bills, two theatre programmes, underclothes, handkerchiefs, needles and thread, an old handbag quite empty. Lynn had been a great spender, and there were about two dozen frocks hanging in the wardrobe. I should have realized she wouldn't have left so many things behind. I began to feel in her frock pockets, and immediately came on a note that was a shock. It was on a piece of the firm's notepaper and simply said: "My dear Lynn, Shall be delighted to see you Wednesday. Frank." The other thing I found, in an inner pocket of her raincoat, was a Yale key. That might not have meant anything except for the label tied on which said "9a"

I TOOK Kent back to Mrs. Lloyd's and then drove shakily into London. By the time I got there it was nearly half past ten. I still felt sick; it kept

coming in fresh waves every few minutes. I went into a snack bar and drank two cups of strong black coffee and swallowed a few mouthfuls of bacon and eggs. The food stuck in my chest. I got up and went out, garaged the car, registered at the same hotel as before. Then I walked down Piccadilly.

When I got into Grosvenor Court Mews there was a chauffeur waiting by a car near one of the other flats, and two girls talking under a lamp. There was also a light in 9, but none in 9a.

I waited about twenty minutes and then began to feel conspicuous, so strolled off towards Curzon Street The sky was an odd colour; there were pink reflections from the ground on the clouds.

I looked at my watch It was ten to twelve. I turned back. Just short of the mews I stopped to light a cigarette and heard Big Ben through, then I felt the key again and walked on.

The car had gone, the girls had gone. I got as far as the garage end where I had watched last night and looked across at the windows of 9. They were in darkness. Miss Lord had retired to rest But now there was a light in the windows of Number 9a

I DROPPED my cigarette and pressed it into the stones of the yard. I took the key out of my pocket and looked at it I waited a minute, taking deep breaths Then I went in.

There was a small light burning at the first turn of the stairs, opposite Miss Lord's door I went past that, stopping once when a stair creaked. Then I came opposite the door of Number 9a No light was to be seen under it.

I wiped the sweat off my hands and very slowly put the key against the jagged opening in the Yale lock. The key slid in and turned. I pressed on the door and it opened with a slight creak.

Now I could see why no light showed. This was a vestibule; a door led off to the right probably into a bathroom, the door straight ahead into the living-room. A light showed under this.

I took two steps and listened There was no sound from inside I put my fingers slowly round the knob of the living-room door, and turned,

Then I didn't move farther. I thought I should pick up some sound of movement or breathing. It didn't come.

I could make out the oblong of one of the windows. The white blind was drawn, but there was just enough light from a street lamp to mark the rectangle. I reached my hand slowly into the room and felt up and down the wall, found the smooth metal of a switch, and clicked it Nothing.

Now it was a question of nerves. The longer we waited the less his advantage would be. But I should have phoned the police instead of this. I knew that now.

Somewhere, I think in the flat below, a clock chimed the quarter-hour Then quiet fell again.

A sound over to the right in the darkest part of the room. I stepped back towards the first door, groped for the switch, put on the light in the vestibule, then lurched sharply into the living-room, veering towards the sound.

Light flooded into the room through the door. Settee, bookcase, television set—something hit me across the head; I fell across a chair clutching at a coat as it went past me; he shook free; as I rolled to the floor I clutched an ankle; he kicked himself clear—darkness fell on me and I lay on the floor holding my head as the outer door opened and slammed.

I forced myself up, stumbled across to the window, scratched the blind away, the mews was empty. I waited. Perhaps he had gone or there was another way out. A great lump on the back of my head; the room wasn't steady yet. But I had to keep watching in case.

I swore and blasphemed—taken in by the oldest trick—a bit of paper or something thrown across the room to give the impression he was on the opposite side. I'd walked practically into him, yet not a recognizable glimpse.

A movement at the end of the mews by the telephone box was almost out of my range of vision. I let the blind fall and ran down the stairs When I got out there was no one to be seen

The blow hadn't broken the skin, but my head was thumping. I stumbled back up the stairs and into the flat. The bulb of the standard lamp in the living-room was on a settee. I put it back in its socket. Then I went back to the door and switched on.

A settee in figured brocade before a built-in electric fire, and an easy chair to match. On a bleached-wood, half-moon table by the wall was a typewriter. I lifted off the cover but there was nothing in the machine

Another door half-open led into a tiny bedroom with a window looking out on the roof. Lynn's things here: dressing-gown behind the door, in a corner the suit-case she had taken when she left—her initials in blue on the side. It was half-full of things neatly packed, a hairbrush, handkerchiefs, stockings and the rest There was only one letter in the bottom, from Messrs. Sterne, Webber and Webber, saying that the petition was now drawn up, waiting for certain legal technicalities before it could be served. It was dated July 14, two days before she had left me.

In the drawers were a few things of hers, all clean The wardrobe held two of her frocks, a light summer coat. A small wicker laundry basket was empty, or looked empty until I saw a bit of paper at the bottom caught in the cane It was a recognizable piece of a cigar band. I put it away in my wallet and turned to the waste-paper basket. Nothing in there.

Back to the second door leading off the vestibule. A bathroom. Her toothbrush, some nail varnish, her soap. And then I saw something that startled me. On the shelf beside the toothbrush was my tooth-paste.

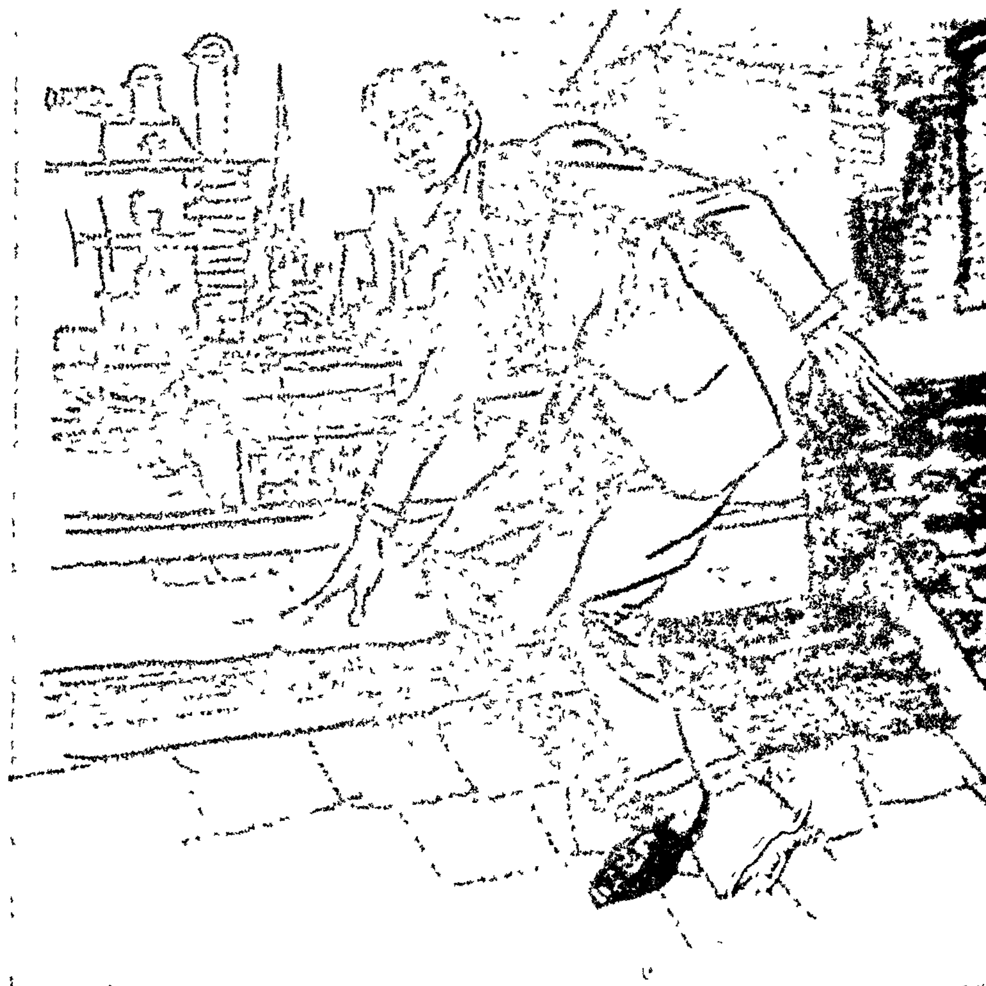
I remembered now I'd missed it on the morning after she left me. The natural inference was that in packing she had taken my tooth-paste in mistake for her own. But as it happened the natural inference would be entirely wrong——

Someone knocked a sharp rap on the outer door I took a step to the door and then stopped. The nature of the knock was wrong I went to the windows and lifted the blind an inch. In the mews below was a police car. Beside it a policeman stood and stared up at my window.

I let the blind fall and went into the bedroom. The window looked out over a flat roof, a drop of perhaps six feet Where did the roof lead? Anyway, not back to the mews.

I heard a scraping at the outer door as I slid the window up and climbed out on the sill It was an easy drop I ran to the edge of the flat roof and found there was no way out here. I either had to go back or on across the next roof, which sloped V-shaped to a central guttering. As I pulled myself up to it a police whistle sounded.

I slithered along the valley between the roofs and came up against the



blank brick wall of a house I glanced back and saw a policeman silhouetted as he got out of the window. I began to climb the sloping roof, clawing at the tiles. The man was following. Reaching the apex of the roof, I let myself slide down the other side. Below there was a small courtyard. I let go and landed on hands and knees

The courtyard was entirely enclosed, but there was a house with french windows at the end, and one window was ajar. I ran towards it and slid through fumbling into a long dark room with a number of tables lit from a half-open door beyond. It looked like an expensive restaurant or the dining-room of a club.

I felt my way towards the half-open door and a mutter of voices, and



looked in. A card-room; two tables were being used. Eight men playing bridge, the room heavy with cigar smoke. I looked round the room I was in. The only door was the one to the card-room

One of my hands was scraped, so I dug it in my pocket and walked slowly into the card-room and towards the door at the other end

I've never known a longer walk in my life. The "dummies" of both tables turned and stared; one of the men playing a hand lifted his head and looked at me with hypnotized interest. After about half an hour I reached the other door, turned the handle, and went through. No one had spoken.

There were stairs I went down the stairs. At the bottom was a large

hall with a porter's box, but the porter had gone off duty. The doors to the street were locked and it took me a minute to find out how the lock worked.

Outside, the street was empty, and about fifty yards away was a taxi-rank. I went up to a taxi and gave him the name of my hotel. No one had come out of the club by the time the taxi turned off into Grosvenor Square.

When I got to bed I slept heavily for a time and then woke absolutely certain that I was lying in the coal cellar. I reached for the light and couldn't find it, and that proved I was in the cellar. I started up, climbing out of bed, and heard that terrible dead rattle of the coal. I had knocked over the bedside lamp. When presently I found the switch the bright light came on with the lamp lying on its side. Then I got back into bed sweating and lay there exhausted. I didn't go to sleep again.

RAY FRENCH had a corduroy jacket thrown carelessly across his shoulders, over a monogrammed silk shirt. He raised his eyebrows in an amused way and looked blandly welcoming.

"Come in, old boy. You're an early visitor. We're just finishing breakfast."

I said: "Sorry, but I wanted to catch you before you went out."

"Yes, of course."

He led the way into a tiny dining-room, from which through double doors you could see into his music-room. Like him his flat was rather a mixture of the orthodox and the flamboyant. There was a second breakfast-cup on the table and a lipstick-stained cigarette end in its saucer.

"Margot got here just before you, so we decided to work up the breakfast-table atmosphere," he said. "Darling, you two know each other, don't you?"

I jerked round, and found that Margot du Caine, Ray's fiancée, had come into the room. "We met at Glyndebourne," I said.

"Yes, of course." She smiled self-consciously. My second impression confirmed the first; she looked inexperienced, unsure, but not unattractive, with a mass of dark glossy hair.

Ray waved a finger towards a chair. "Coffee?"

"Thanks, I've finished." I glanced at the girl and hesitated. "Ray, I wanted to talk with you——"

Ray's laugh bubbled over. "I haven't any secrets from Margot."

"All the same, I think if you don't mind . . . ."

"I'll go," she said We watched her move through into the music-room and Ray shut the double doors.

"When is the wedding?" I said

"Sunday at three. We're spending Sunday night in London and catching the *Otrantes* on Monday. What's the matter, Mike? You look as if you're carrying more than your pay-load."

"Lynn and I have separated for good."

He whistled. "You as good as said that on the phone, but I hoped——'

"Ray," I said, "you knew Lynn had a flat of her own in Grosvenor Court Mews, didn't you?"

He looked at me and then sat sideways in a chair "Whispers, I must confess, have reached my ears."

"You've been there, of course. . . . Have you been often?"

"What am I supposed to say?"

"You're not compelled to say anything; but Lynn didn't have that flat for four months just for ornament."

"Has she had it four months? Good Lord."

"When did you first go there?"

"How did you know I'd been?"

"I thought it unlikely that another of my friends smoked these cheroots"

I put the piece of the cigar band on the table near him. He stared at it. A muscle in his cheek moved.

I said· "What is there between you and Lynn?"

"Would you be surprised if I told you absolutely nothing at all?"

"Very—now."

"It's the truth—now."

"Then what *was* there between you?"

"Why don't you ask Lynn?"

"Because I can't find her."

"But *really*, Mike . . . ."

"When did it begin?"

He picked up the piece of cigar band, rolled the paper into a ball and flicked it away with finger and thumb. There was a long silence. "About—four months ago," he said at last.

"And how long did it go on?"

"Desultorily until the beginning of June."

"Why did it end?"

He turned and looked at me in a queer way, a bit embarrassed but challenging. "Lynn just told me one day that she'd had enough . . In a sense I was relieved. I'm not un-fond of women, Mike, but carrying on with the wife of a friend isn't my strongest line. And then I had met Margot."

"Did you quarrel with Lynn?"

"Lord, no We parted dear friends, still write and phone, as you know."

"Did she give any reason for finishing this—this affair?"

Ray swung his leg off the chair and put his arms into his jacket. "This *is* a fact-finding commission, isn't it? Yes, if you want to know. She said she'd found someone else."

"Did she mention a name?"

"Naturally not. . . . She gave me the impression that she'd known him some time, but that suddenly the lid had blown off, as it were"

I said: "When did you last see Lynn?"

"At Glyndebourne when we all met. Eighth of July, wasn't it? But I phoned her after that, at Greencroft."

"When was it she told you she was leaving me?"

"What? She didn't Oh, you mean over the phone that time? I didn't take it that she was leaving you. I simply offered to toil down with the records that Saturday and she said she'd be away."

I got up and walked to the window. The storms of yesterday had cleared, but the sky was grey and low.

He said "Look, old boy, I don't want to *blackguard* Lynn; but in all fairness . . . how would you go on if a woman made a dead set at you —and one as attractive as Lynn? How much do you understand Lynn, Mike? When you find her, ask her if what I say isn't true."

"Shut up," I said, and went to the door.

"Wait." He had flushed "I've always liked you, Mike, and the fact that you now hate my guts doesn't alter it. There's one thing I want to say to you. Your marriage is all to pieces, and you blame me and you blame other men and you blame Lynn. Has it ever occurred to you to blame yourself?"

"Quite often."

"Well, don't"

I stood watching him

He said· "If you want the truth I'll tell you. Lynn's charming and decorative and likeable. But she's a party girl of the first order. Men swarm round her like flies and she loves it If she wants to divorce you, let her. You'll be well out of it."

CHAPTER 5

SOME PEOPLE who haven't actually been in a shooting war get through a good bit of their lives without much contact with death I had. My feeling had been that what's left of a person after death isn't much more important than an old dressing-gown. But the discovery of yesterday seemed to have knocked most of my earlier notions over the ropes. I don't know why, but the feelings it raised in me came up from something older than reason It was as if I'd recognized not only Lynn but some knowledge beyond what I ordinarily knew.

As I got near the works I knew that just now the one thing I wanted more than anything else in the world was to see Stella She was like an answer, a reassurance. Yes, there was death and corruption, but also there was light and life.

Miss Allen said "Good morning, Mr. Granville. We were hoping you were coming this morning. Several rather urgent things have cropped up"

I looked at the electric clock, which gave one of its clicks and limped to a quarter to twelve

"Mr. Thurston rang you from Harwell twice this morning. He said would you ring him as soon as you got in"

"Right. Give me a minute or two to get sorted out."

There was a tap and Read came in. "Morning, Mr. Granville. Everything all right?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Were you fit yesterday? I mean not turning up at all . . . ."

"I was fit. All right, Miss Allen, I'll call you."

As the girl went out Read said "We had merry hell yesterday But you see the men are still here"

"What men?"

"The electricians. Surely you knew about it."

"Oh? . . . Oh yes They haven't struck, then?"

"No, I got a wedge in. The ballot's been put off till tomorrow or Monday."

I tried to think. It seemed a month ago "If this ever gets as far as an official union matter . . ."

Read shrugged. "We either take McGowrie back or there won't be an electrician within miles."

When he had gone, I thought to myself that Read did not seem to have been at fault as Frank Dawson had suggested. I had a hunch that perhaps Dawson was at the bottom of more than I realized. I pressed the inter-com and told Miss Allen I wanted to see Mrs. Curtis.

"She couldn't get in today, sir."

"Oh."

"Er—shall I get Harwell for you?"

"Yes, please."

I drew prison bars on my blotting-pad until the call came through Thurston said· "We've fixed a full meeting for three o'clock tomorrow."

"Where? At Harwell?"

"No, at Llanveryan. A Canadian called Holborn will be there. He's on a visit to England, and he's one of the men who's been building scintillometers for aerial prospecting in Canada Bennett thought it would be a good idea to have him in for his expert advice, and to give a deciding opinion on Steel's criticisms."

"I don't like the sound of that," I said.

"Nor I. Because I think it will be a deciding opinion on the instrument as a whole."

"Why is everybody going down to Llanveryan?"

"That's what I rang you about. This Canadian expert wants to test our equipment as thoroughly as he can. So we've fixed a trial for eleven tomorrow. You can be there by then?"

"Yes," I said, and knew I couldn't. I knew I couldn't be there at all.

When he'd rung off I sat a while longer making the prison bars more realistic. I couldn't go down tomorrow because this afternoon I had to go to Greencroft to "discover" the body of my wife. I doubted if even

Harwell had the pull to get me released on bail. Tomorrow I might have had to fight for all the things I considered worth-while in the scintillometer. Now I should not be there. But anyway nothing mattered any more.

I had some sort of lunch with all these things milling in my head. Afterwards I drove down to Greencroft. I stopped the car in the drive. A grey wind blew across the garden and rustled the leaves of the laurels. The house looked chill and deserted. It was no good pretending I'd been into the cellar; there had to be coal dust on my shoes and hands; I had to go into the cellar. I cut off the engine and slid my fingers round the steering-wheel; it was warm and clammy from my hands. I opened the door and got out. My knees were no good. It all had to happen today as it should have happened yesterday. At least I wouldn't have to sham feeling queer.

I got out the key of the house and began to walk towards the front door. My feet crunched noisily on the gravel. It was queer because it was as if there were an echo of my own footsteps. At the door I stopped dead, my hair prickling, and turned. There was no one behind me but the footsteps went on.

They were coming towards me round the corner of the house. The day had never been more chill than it was at that moment. Then a woman came round the corner. It was Stella.

She said: "What luck! I came hoping to find you——" Then she stopped, her eyes moving quickly over my face. "What's the matter?"

I tried to put a brake on. "Nothing . . . you startled me."

"*Sorry* Did you think it was Lynn back?"

"No. I didn't think. . . . How on earth did you get here?"

"By train. It isn't difficult. This end there's a walk, and I came on the off-chance . . . I was worried about you"

"Why?"

'Well, you weren't at the works yesterday and you'd promised to see us in the evening."

I wanted to sit down somewhere. I put my hand out and took her fingers. "You don't know how much I've longed to see you these last two days You never will know. Every hour . . ."

She seemed touched "Mike, dear——"

"But you shouldn't have come. It's better that we aren't seen together so I won't ask you in——" I tried to swallow. "I'll take you back. We can talk in the car."

Little lines gathered about her eyes as she looked at me. "What's happened, Mike?"

"I'll tell you in the car."

"I suppose it's better not to be seen here."

"Much better."

We got into the car and Stella lit a cigarette. "I don't know why I can't stop smoking," she said. "My average was about three a day until this week."

My hand was on the wheel, and she put hers over it I took it and kissed her fingers and then leaned my face against them.

"Darling, what is it?"

"Just keep on saying that," I said.

"I wish I could."

"Stella . . . ."

Then I told her about finding the key and going to Lynn's flat. I told her all the rest from there. I realized that for the first time I was lying—by omission—to her. We talked, but all the time I was on edge to get away from the house. At last I started the engine. We moved away slowly. Whatever else, the discovery was off for now——

As we turned the corner of the drive, I braked hard. A car was stopped a couple of yards inside the drive and a man was standing with his hand on the door When my tyres slithered he came towards us. He was a man of about forty in a bowler hat and a dark suit with speckled trousers. There was a circular mark on his cheek like a vaccination mark, and he had a tight mouth with a full bottom lip.

He took off his hat when he saw Stella To me he said: "I beg your pardon, are you Mr. Granville?"

"Yes."

"My name is Baker Detective-Sergeant Baker. I wonder if you could spare me a few minutes?"

"I can hardly refuse it."

He smiled without looking amused. "Er—you were coming away from the house?"

"Yes. This is my technical assistant, Mrs. Curtis."

He inclined his head. "I won't keep you long, Mr. Granville; but we're making a few inquiries, and I thought——"

"Inquiries about what?"

He looked surprised, as if he thought I ought to know. "About your wife, Mr. Granville."

I noticed he was wearing a stiff white collar with a blue striped shirt, and his black tie was pulled into a tiny knot. I said: "What was it you wanted to know?"

Baker glanced at Stella. "Would it be convenient if we went back to the house?"

"Unfortunately we can't," I said. "I'm living in Letherton and forgot the key. Would you like to drive along there with me?"

"I don't think that will be necessary. Perhaps a few minutes' conversation . . . ."

"I'll walk on," Stella said. "Catch up with me, Mr Granville, will you?"

I protested, but she opened the door and slid out. She smiled at Sergeant Baker, and he raised his hat again.

"I was really lucky to catch you, then?" he said.

"Has my wife sent you?"

"No, not exactly." He ran a hand along the panel of the door

"I was served with a petition for divorce this week. It rather jaundices one's attitude towards strange officials."

"Your wife is divorcing you, Mr. Granville?"

"That's her idea"

His glance strayed past me and down the road "No, I came really to inquire if you knew where your wife was at the moment."

"I wish I did."

He put out his bottom lip. "We're making a few inquiries at the instigation of her bank. When did you last see her, Mr. Granville?"

"Three weeks ago yesterday. When I got home in the evening she wasn't there, and the following morning I had a letter from her telling me she was leaving me."

"Could I see the letter some time?"

"Is it of special interest?"

"It could be. You see, her bank is not entirely satisfied about her signature on a letter they have from her."

I looked at him and he looked back at me.

Then I got out of the car and took out my pocket-book. "I think it's here."

"You haven't heard from her since?"

"No." I gave him the letter.

He read it. "Are you satisfied that this is your wife's handwriting?"

"Yes."

"Er—were you surprised when she left you, Mr. Granville?"

"Very."

"You didn't expect her to petition for a divorce?"

"Certainly I didn't."

A wasp came between us for a moment, and Baker waved it away. "Were you aware that your wife had a flat in London?"

"Not before she left me. I've discovered it since. I've been there two or three times, but no one was in."

"There was someone in last night. The lady below phoned the police, but the man escaped through a window."

"Man? It wasn't Lynn, then?"

"Apparently there was a struggle. Can you give me any leads as to where you think your wife might be?"

I took out my cigarette case and offered him a cigarette He smiled and shook his head.

"I don't know what you know of my movements in the last four or five days, Sergeant Baker. But if you check them you'll find that since I had this divorce petition I've thrown over everything trying to find her."

"Did you make no effort to find her before that?"

"The bank will tell you I did. And I rang her mother and every friend of hers I could trace."

"Have you felt worried about what might have happened to her?"

"Do you think something has happened to her?"

"Not necessarily. In any case the bank may be mistaken as to her signature. Certainly the letter was typed on the machine which is in her flat."

"I see you've already been pretty thorough."

"We do our best. Tell me, Mr. Granville, is the lady who was with you the—er—woman named, as they call it, in the divorce petition?"

"I'm sure you know that she is."

"She is married, I understand?"

"Yes"

He took his hand off the headlamp of the car. "Well, thank you, Mr. Granville. We'll carry on with our inquiries We don't, of course, propose to list Mrs. Granville among the 'missing persons,' as yet. There may be some very simple explanation of the whole thing. Where can I find you if I want you again?"

"Care of the Old Bull, Letherton."

I left him sitting in his car watching me drive away.

I SAID to Stella: "I lied to that fellow about the key for several reasons One was that I didn't want him to think we'd spent the afternoon alone in the house together."

"So he thinks Lynn has disappeared"

"He's only guessing."

We drove on I said. "Stella . . will you invite me to supper tonight?"

"Of course. Come in now."

"Will John be well enough to see me?"

"Oh yes. He's in bed, but——"

We had reached Letherton. I wondered if Baker was still at Greencroft, walking round the house and peering in the windows. Coming to a sudden decision, I said: "I want very much to have a talk with John."

She looked at me. "What about?"

"About this policeman's visit"

JOHN CURTIS pushed himself farther up the pillows I couldn't tell what he was thinking. For two or three minutes he hadn't spoken—not since I stopped. Downstairs I could hear Stella as she moved about getting supper.

Without looking at me he said. "Why do you tell *me* this?"

"I thought if anyone could advise me it would be you."

His face was tight-drawn, the brilliant brown eyes concentrated "You realize you've taken a vital step in telling me all this?"

"Yes."

"And a risk."

"The risk of being disbelieved I know."

"Oh, I believe you. You're not a murderer. You've too much imagination. And gentleness. Though I think you might have put them both to better uses." He shook his head "No, the risk you've taken is that, so, to speak, you've passed the baby on to me. Whether you do as I advise or not, I have to tell the police or get in a tricky position myself."

I went to the window and sat in the window-seat "And what do you advise?"

"Tell me first about yourself and your wife. Tell me about things on the periphery of the story. I want to see more of the picture."

I tried to tell him about all the people distantly or closely involved, Simon Heppelwhite and Ray French and Frank Dawson and our life together before she disappeared. "The trouble is," I said, "that the whole equation isn't here. Bits of it are probably floating around Lynn's London flat and the men who visited her there."

John said: "An equation can have unknown quantities The real difficulty lies in setting the thing up."

"It's in trying to set it up—or break it down—that I've landed myself in a worse mess than before."

"This man Simon Heppelwhite. He's your best friend and hers. If he's not involved he could have a clearer view of your marriage than anyone. Have you seen him recently?"

"Not since this thing blew its top off."

"He would be worth seeing. There must be a reason why he appeared to take sides against Lynn when you talked to him. And why has your wife been meeting this man from your works, Dawson? . . ." He tried to take a deep breath and failed. "This man French gives the impression that your wife was promiscuous What do you say? You should know."

I said bitterly: "Perhaps I don't know. I should have called her attractive to and attracted by men. I'd no reason to suppose more."

Silence fell between us.

He said: "We're supposing that the police will be able to fix the date of her death accurately. They may not. In fact, from what you've told me about the condition of the body, I doubt if the pathologists will be able to specify the date of her death to within four or five days."

"I think she died the night she disappeared."

"Then who came back the following night?"

"I think the person who killed her had left something behind and

wanted to get it. The scent came from the bottle he'd upset. I think the ear-ring had been lying there since the night before."

"But your wife must have intended to divorce you. The petition was drawn up when she was still alive."

"Yes, and I think she must have meant to leave me that night. The letter she wrote me was typical, and her handwriting is particularly hard to copy."

"But you believe she didn't pack her own bag?"

"I'm certain she didn't complete it, anyway. She wouldn't under *any* circumstances pack my tooth-paste. She always hated the flavour. She'd be as likely to pack my shoes by mistake."

"The first question the police will ask is who stands to benefit from your wife's death. What was the motive. profit, concealment, reputation, sex, anger, jealousy? And how was the murder done?"

"What do you advise me to do?" I said again

Outside on the lawn a black cat was stalking a thrush.

"Go and see a good criminal lawyer first thing in the morning. Tell him everything and do whatever he advises."

"Which will be to see the police at once"

"Yes, but in his presence You'll be in a far stronger position after you've consulted him I think I know the man who would do—I was at school with him—Digby Hamilton He's right at the top."

The black cat had got very near the bird now. Then almost as the cat launched himself, the thrush saw the danger and flung open his wings A quick flutter put him just out of reach, and gathering height he soared into a tree.

"Doing what you say wouldn't keep Stella out of the picture"

"Perhaps nothing will."

"Yes, but if I was arrested and charged they might think she had some knowledge of it—if we're supposed to be lovers. She might be dragged in as an accessory after the fact."

"The danger's there, but it will be there whatever you do. Actually, even if you were the murderer and they convicted you, they couldn't find enough evidence to move against her"

"Only to poison the rest of her life with ugly rumours."

"The surest way of avoiding that is to clear yourself, and the surest way of clearing yourself is to see Digby Hamilton"

I got up and walked across the room. Now that it came to the point, I shied away from the thing I'd been going to do three hours before. Detective-Sergeant Baker's arrival on the scene had made everything infinitely more difficult.

"I know you're right; it's the logical, sensible thing to do. But telling you about it—even though you've believed me—has made me realize what a lame-duck story it really sounds. I wish I could make one more positive step of some sort before giving away my freedom of action. For instance, I feel I ought to follow up this note from Frank Dawson."

"He's in Wales at present?"

"Yes, I had promised to go down myself tomorrow. . . . Where does Hamilton live?" I asked, partly to gain time.

"We should find him at his flat in the Temple. He might even see you tonight. I did him a favour a couple of years ago and I don't think he'd refuse."

I picked up the book he had put down when I came in and stared at it, trying to think. He said, "Have you decided, Mike?"

"Give me until after supper."

Footsteps again, and Stella put her head in. "Things are nearly done. If Mike will give me a hand upstairs with them . . . ."

"No," said John. "I'd rather come down."

"But only a few hours ago the doctor said——"

"I'll take the risk. I have a phone call to make."

WHILE she was finishing things below I helped him to get up. When he was dressed he sat on the bed and got his breath back before having a shot at the stairs.

He said rather carefully: "You know in this equation we were discussing, there's one symbol that puzzles me more than it should, because it's the one I'm most familiar with. It's the letter S—which shouldn't be an unknown quantity to me at all."

I reached for his slippers under the bed and took more time than I needed. Hoping my voice sounded right, I said, "We've agreed she's not really in it at all."

"Oh, she is in one sense, whether we like it or not."

"Are these slippers the right way round? There doesn't seem any difference."

"There isn't. . . . Are you in love with Stella, Mike?"

There was nothing I could do but straighten up. I looked at him He had his finger inside the heel of the slipper, fixing it

"Yes, John I am."

"And does Stella love you?" As he spoke he lifted his own head, his face a little less colourless from bending, his eyes full of a sort of incredulous inquiry.

"You ought to know she doesn't."

He was silent a minute. Slowly he buttoned his coat, the strong fingers fumbling, and not only from physical weakness. Then he said: "One isn't responsible for one's emotions, only for one's actions. . . . Perhaps I should feel gratified that we have an admiration in common."

"I've only known it for the last four or five days. Believe me, I'd no idea . . . ."

"One doesn't necessarily have till the last minute."

"I thought I felt the same as ever about Lynn It must strike you as queer, phoney——"

"Not as much as it might, because something similar happened to me. When I met Stella, my first wife had been dead only two months When I found myself in love with Stella it seemed to put my own sincerity in question. Did you feel anything like that?"

"Very much. . . . But in my case there's—an extra difficulty."

"You mean that Stella isn't free," he said gently "But S becomes part of the equation."

"I still don't see it. She's only on the extreme outside edge of this mess, and that, I hope, is where she's going to stay."

He said· "Consider the significance of a point which travels round the circumference of an ellipse at a uniform rate. . ." He got up and steadied himself against the bed. "Shall we go down?"

John Curtis rang his lawyer friend while Stella was upstairs making his bed. For some reason I couldn't explain, I didn't want to be the one to tell Stella about Lynn. I felt I couldn't get the words out. If John told her in his own time, at least there would be no risk of my having to see the look in her eyes when she knew.

Digby Hamilton was in Paris, his wife said, but she was expecting him back in the morning; so it was agreed I should ring him in the

morning, at Bouverie 6775. I stayed at the cottage until ten. Stella walked to the gate with me when I left. She said: "It's been a queer evening, Mike. Everyone—walled up. Have we all got secrets from each other?"

"Yes. . . . Stella, he knows that I love you."

"*Why?* How?"

"He asked me. I couldn't lie to him about it."

"What did he say?"

"He asked me if you loved me too"

She put her fingers on the gate. "Well?"

"I said he ought to know that you didn't. I think he believed what I said."

"Do you know why I really came to Greencroft this afternoon? It was to say I didn't think I could go on without telling him."

I thought it out, trying to be absolutely honest "Stella, if he's *got* to know about us, then I'm willing to face it; but I don't think we should insist on telling him because of some discomfort in ourselves. We're not entitled to make him sleep worse at nights so that we can sleep better. We'd be squaring our consciences at his expense."

After a while she said. "If I cared for him less I should care for myself a lot more."

I made a slight movement towards her "No, Mike," she whispered.

"I *know,*" I said. "I wasn't going to. . . . But a lot of things may happen before we meet again."

"What sort of things?"

"Ask John tomorrow. Darling, I can't tell you. Let me say good night to you now."

So I kissed the inside of her hand and left her.

CHAPTER 6

When I got back to the Old Bull I went straight to bed but couldn't sleep, dozing and starting awake as if sleep were an enemy. My thoughts were on the edge of a precipice; to sleep would be to fall into the pit. But about four I gave in. Then, oddly, my nightmare was not about the expected things. it was about the scintillometer and the trials at Llanveryan.

When the phone rang to tell me it was eight o'clock, I was in a sweat. After a bath I breakfasted quietly in the over-timbered dining-room. There was a paper on the next table and I saw a heading which said: "State of Emergency in Southern Sudan. Eighty Killed." I thought, how important *is* our equipment? Can it do something in these peculiar circumstances that no other equipment can? Is it, as the man from the Foreign Office said, "necessary to England"? If it is, then it's important it should be approved irrespective of what happens to the man who made it. At half past nine I phoned Bouverie 6775.

A woman answered. "Oh, is that Mr Granville?" she said. "This is Mrs. Hamilton. I'm very sorry but my husband has been delayed in Paris. He rang me late last night and hopes to be home on the last plane tonight."

"Oh," I said.

"From what Mr. Curtis said, your business is rather urgent. My husband's office would be able to recommend someone else Or if you can wait that long, ring tomorrow any time after nine."

"Sunday morning?"

"That won't matter. I mentioned Dr Curtis's call to Digby, and he said he would see you as soon as he got home"

I thought it out. "Thank you, Mrs. Hamilton, I'll phone you tomorrow"

I hung up and rubbed my hand along the sore place at the back of my head Then I phoned Stella. I said: "Stella, give John a message, will you? Tell him Digby Hamilton isn't home today but that I've arranged to meet him tomorrow And tell him I'm going to spend today at Llanveryan."

ALL THE ROADS were crowded, it being a summer Saturday morning, and I got to Llanveryan about ten past two. There I found no trials had taken place yet because the plane had broken an oil feed and wouldn't be ready to take off for some hours. This at first looked like a stroke of luck.

Holborn, the expert from Canada, was a big, sharp-boned fellow of forty-odd with nothing much to say and a cagey expression. When I met him he was talking to my old critic, Steel, the geophysicist. Thurston was there, from Harwell, and I had five minutes alone with him

but I didn't get to speak to Frank Dawson because, everyone having arrived, it was decided to have a preliminary meeting right away.

Thurston led off with a highly technical account of the test trials so far. Then after we'd discussed them Dr. Bennett, the scientist in charge of the project, asked what were Mr. Holborn's impressions of the scintillometer.

Holborn twisted a pencil in his big bony hands and said that obviously he couldn't as of here and now say much about the practical operation of the equipment, as he had seen it running only when the plane was on the ground. He made a few technical suggestions and we talked for a while. Then Bennett said: "I don't think we can really go any further until Mr. Holborn has had a chance to test the instrument in flight. The plane will be ready about five, I hope"

We broke up then and went out. I fell into step beside Dawson. "Walk with me as far as the end of the runway," I said. "There's something I want to ask you."

"What's the matter? Has Read joined the Communist Party?"

"Frank, when was the last time you saw Lynn?"

He cocked his head, bright-eyed, sardonic. "Lynn? I don't remember. Why?"

"We've broken up. Did you know?"

Rather surprisingly he flushed. "When?"

"A few weeks ago. Can you remember when you last saw her?"

". . . Oh, it would be February, I suppose, that time she came down to the works just after we'd moved. I don't get the chance now to drop round for a drink the way I did in London."

"I had to go through some of her things on Thursday night and found this." We had stopped, and I took out the scribbled message and handed it to him. I watched him frowning at it as if the writing were too small for him to read.

He said: "This was written ages ago. Last year."

He handed the paper back.

"The ink doesn't look old to me."

He turned his frown on me. "Look, Mike, I'm not used to being called a liar."

"This note has been written since February. It was in the pocket of a new frock. How often have you been seeing Lynn?"

He began moving again. "Why shouldn't I see her? We were friends before you made the move from London—remember? Or has that conveniently escaped your notice since you became so much the boss?"

I said angrily: "You silly fool, I *had* to make the move when I did—you know it as well as I do! And where you're concerned there's never been any question of my being boss. As for friendship, I thought you were my friend as well as Lynn's!"

We came to the end of the runway and turned back.

I said: "When did you write this note?"

"Four or five weeks ago. Some time in early July."

"Have you ever been Lynn's lover?"

That stopped him again. He looked at me with contempt. "You're a little out of your mind this afternoon. The answer is no."

I said: "Why did you send this note?"

"She wrote and asked me to meet her in Letherton. I did. I met her several times. Any objections?"

"Why particularly did she want to see you? Was it to discuss my awful behaviour?"

"You admit it's been bad, then."

"Did she tell you I was having an affair with Stella Curtis?"

"There's not much point in being coy about it, is there?"

I put my hand on his coat. "*What* did Lynn tell you, Frank? It's vitally important I should know."

He shrugged. "Mike, what's the good of this? She no doubt had it all out with you before she left. . . . Well, personally, I don't think it was very pretty, taking the Curtis girl back to your own home when Lynn was out and playing ducks and drakes with her."

"It might not have been pretty if it had ever happened."

He hesitated. "And did Mrs Thing, your housekeeper, imagine what she saw?"

"Mrs Lloyd? What did she see?"

"According to Lynn, so far as I can remember, you arrived at Greencroft with Stella Curtis one lunch-time—found Mrs. Lloyd still there and sent her packing. So Mrs. Lloyd, being quizzy, tiptoed back ten minutes later and looked in at the french windows and saw the girl lying on the settee. If it——"

"Just a minute." I lit a cigarette. I was surprised to see the flame of

the lighter wobbling. "Dear Mrs Lloyd. So that's what she thought. I remember the time she means. I'd brought Stella back to the house from Harwell, to pick up your I.D.A. plans. When she got in the house she nearly fainted and had to lie down. I remember bending over her to give her a glass of brandy, and I believe I lifted her legs on to the settee. I suppose Mrs. Lloyd chose that moment to look in. It's surprising what a little imagination can do. Anything else?"

Dawson said uncomfortably: "What about last week when you conveniently fogged up and spent the night at Brecon?"

"Lynn left me before that happened. I want to know what else *she* told you"

"Oh, that you were out at night with the Curtis girl all the time and cared nothing for your wife any more."

I said. "Was she asking your help in some way?"

His thin face flushed again. "Yes. But if it's of any interest, she's had no direct evidence from me."

"Could she have had any?"

"Spying isn't my line. When a fat little private detective came snooping round I told him to clear out."

"Thank you at least for that. Did you tell Lynn you weren't prepared to help her?"

"Yes, eventually She didn't like it, and that's the last time I saw her."

We'd been walking slowly back towards the buildings Thurston and Holborn had come out and were walking towards us.

I said: "Did it occur to you, Frank, that Lynn might be in love with somebody else and be trying to collect false evidence against me so that she could get her divorce the right way round?"

"No," he said. "I happen to be her friend as well as yours."

THE PLANE was ready at seven. I went up in her first for a trial run, and then Holborn took off I knew that on his report depended not merely whether they should install a radio-altimeter and use a bigger plane, as Steel advised, but whether they should use our equipment in its entirety or his. On it too might depend the future development of the factory, even possibly its survival.

About eight Dr. Bennett took me aside. He said. "Supposing that Holborn's report is not unfavourable, Mr. Granville; and supposing we

decide to use your equipment in the desert—is there any chance at all that you would be able to go with it?"

I stared at him. "With it? D'you mean to operate it?"

"Yes. The Foreign Office feels very strongly that we can't afford any slip-up in operation And it would be of immense benefit if there were someone there who understood the equipment thoroughly in case of a breakdown. No one knows an instrument like its maker."

"Thank you, Dr. Bennett Unfortunately I have a factory."

"It would be interesting work, and would be completed in a few months. It might even be dangerous."

"Do you tell me that as an inducement?"

He smiled. "On the whole I thought you would find it so."

I said: "I have—other problems as well."

"It's a pity, because if the decision is a narrow one the question of operator might influence us in making it."

"I'm sorry." I stared out of the window at the blue of the evening sky. "Anyway, Holborn's report may be highly unfavourable."

At that moment Thurston came along the corridor. "Oh, you're wanted on the phone, Granville. Some man in London."

"In London? Did he say who it was?"

"I think he said Heppelwhite. Simon Heppelwhite."

IT WAS an ordinary phone booth, a relic of the aerodrome days. I squeezed in and shut the door. "Hullo?"

"Michael? This is Simon. I'm sorry to trouble you, but we have a visitor here who says he's a friend of yours I'm personally not sure whether he's brilliant or a lunatic He says he has your authority to inquire into Lynn's private life. Why he should come to see me . . ."

"What's his name?"

"Curtis. John Curtis."

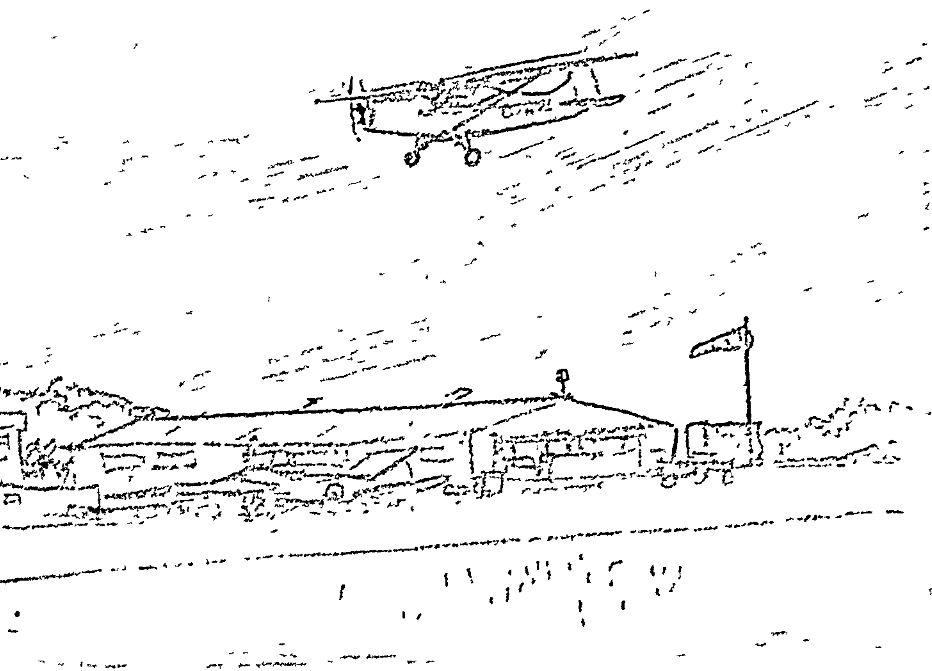
I stared at the phone. "But he can't be—Curtis is a sick man. He's been in bed off and on for weeks."

"You do know him, then?"

"I know him, but I don't understand how he's got up to London. Is he a tall, thin man with very clear, deep-set brown eyes?"

"Yes, that's the fellow. I can't quite understand—is he helping you to collect evidence for a divorce?"


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"No. He's just a friend. . . . What does he want to know?"

"Details of Lynn's past life. Among other things, whether I'd call her promiscuous."

"And would you?"

There was silence, till he said: "No, I should not. But who am I to instruct her husband?"

"Well, instruct Curtis He won't put it to any ill use. Where is he now?"

"In the next room talking to a friend of mine, Joy Fraser."

It was on my tongue to tell Simon to keep his red-head out of this, but I didn't.

"Has Curtis got his wife with him?"

"No. I think he came by taxi."

"Well, if he's not careful he'll——" I stopped, a sudden thought had got itself into my mind.

"Hullo . . . Simon, will you give John Curtis a message for me? Tell

him that nothing he does to help me—*nothing at all*—will justify his taking risks with his own life. Tell him—tell him you don't ever solve an equation by cheating, by—by striking out one of the principal symbols. Tell him——"

"Michael, I'm not a tape-recorder! I'll do my best, but make it short."

"No," I said. "That's all."

I BANGED the receiver down and came out and stood staring at some tattered announcements on the notice-board. I was fogged and upset by John Curtis's move. There was nothing he could do that the police wouldn't do better; in fact it went dead counter to his own advice to me. I couldn't understand how Stella had allowed him to go. . . . I wished now I'd spoken to him direct. I wished very much that he hadn't gone. It seemed to me his lunatic excursion would have only one purpose. . . .

Dusk was falling and the plane was not yet back. I went back into the phone booth and put through a call to the Curtises' number in Letherton, then I stood in the box trying to overcome the feeling of hopelessness that had got me round the throat.

As I waited I heard the drone of the plane, and then I saw Thurston and Dawson go along the corridor towards the outer door. Neither of them saw me. After a pause Holborn and the pilot came in, accompanied by the other two. I caught sight of Holborn's face and thought it looked more bony and taciturn than ever. All of them went into our conference-room, and then I saw Steel and Dr. Bennett go in, and finally the man from the Foreign Office. I heard the phone ringing now in the cottage in Letherton It went patiently on, twenty-one times Then the operator said· "I'm sorry, there's no reply "

"Thank you " I hung up and came out feeling a bit queer. It had been hot in the booth and short of air. Or perhaps it was because I'd had only six hours' sleep since I found Lynn

As I opened the door of the conference-room they were all sitting round waiting for me. I came to my seat at the table and sat in it. Holborn was playing with his pencil again Steel was polishing his glasses

Holborn glanced at Dr. Bennett. Bennett said: "Mr Holborn was just about to give us his report, Mr Granville."

I didn't speak

Holborn said: "I was explaining that 'report' was too imposing a word for anything I can say after only ninety minutes' flying But of course I can give you my impressions, and I can link them, as it were, with the reports of the tests you have made this week and which I've studied fairly carefully today." He still didn't look up but began to draw figure eights on his pad. "My impression is that this survey instrument —in spite of its simplicity—to some extent because of it—is an advance on any other machine yet built. On its present showing and for its present purpose, I wouldn't alter it or add to it in any way."

I DIDN'T go back to London that night. The meeting didn't break up until twenty-five to ten, and then it became a smaller party of Thurston, Holborn, Dawson and me. I still felt under the weather and couldn't face the thought of a four- or five-hour drive through the night.

I knew that at some future time I should probably be happy about the results of today. I didn't regret having come, in spite of the risk of further delay in my personal affairs. There was a sort of split in my feelings that wouldn't let me have any satisfaction out of this result and yet didn't let me forget it.

I finally left the others talking together, borrowed an alarm clock and set it for five o'clock In bed I remember being very restless at first, trying to reason out how John had found the stamina to visit London. And I remember feeling certain there was something in what Simon had said to me that was pretty important Then suddenly it was daylight and I sat up rather scared. I had slept through the alarm and it was ten minutes to seven.

I got up in a hurry, scraped some beard off, and went hastily to breakfast. There was only Frank Dawson at the long table. I sat down nearly opposite him and he looked at me, half sardonic, half hostile, and went on with his breakfast.

I said: "I'm sorry I can't take you back with me this morning, Frank. I've got to see a lawyer in London and I'm driving straight in "

"I can cadge a lift from someone," he said shortly

We ate in silence, and I finished quickly Then I noticed that Frank was sitting plucking at his lip. He glowered at me.

"Look, Mike, I don't think I've played quite fair with you I didn't tell you the whole truth last night."

"About—Lynn?"

"About Lynn—and other things. You said did it seem to me that she might be in love with someone else and trying to collect evidence to use against you. I said no. Well, that's true up to a point."

"Oh?"

He hesitated. "It's true up to about a month ago. But I happened to go into the Leather Jacket at Heaton Corner one Friday about seven and she was in there with a man. You don't need to have it down in black and white when she looked at him the way she did. They didn't see me so I got out fairly quick. . . ."

I said: "What was he like, this man?"

"Youngish, round face, slick hair . . ."

"*When* was this?"

"Oh, it would be early last month. Let's see, the Monday I saw her last was the Monday you had that flap about the condenser and worked till midnight."

"That was the thirteenth of July," I said.

"Could be. Well, it would be the Friday before that."

"The tenth." Two days after our visit to Glyndebourne. "Did they seem—all right together, Lynn and this man?"

He sat with a finger inside his collar moving it round. "I told you. I only watched them for a minute or two. Come to think of it, she seemed to be setting the pace. On the Monday following, as I say, I met her for a drink. Though I didn't say it out loud, she must have guessed I was on to something, and in the end, because I wouldn't play ball, she accused me of being disloyal to her. It's lovely the way women use the word loyalty, isn't it?"

"Have you been seeing Lynn more than you told me?"

"We've met ever since the factory moved—once or twice a month. I—she started complaining almost at once."

"Is that why you've been gunning for me ever since we moved?"

He flushed. "Well—if I have—it's been that and maybe a guilty conscience. Read and I were equally to blame for that mess in February, and it's easy to ease your own mind by shoving the responsibility on someone else. Perhaps if I hadn't been so sore about Harwell I wouldn't have believed all her lies."

Some sea-gulls were wheeling and crying in the sunshine outside.

I said: "Perhaps it's a mistake to think too badly of Lynn, Frank. She never could help using her charm on people, it was the way she was made. But I think this once she got caught by it, and by something rather similar in another person So in her distress she put her friends to whatever use she could "

He didn't seem to notice I had used the past tense "You haven't seen her at all since then?" I said.

"No. I rang her a couple of times, because I didn't want to break with her altogether. The first time she seemed friendly again; but the second time she appeared to be having a row with someone and cut me off pretty short "

"A *row?* What day was that?"

He shrugged "It isn't that important, is it?"

"Try to remember."

He stared at me curiously. "It would be the Wednesday or the Thursday. . . . Thursday, because it was the day that man came to doctor the navigational computer. I rang her while you were with him—about three thirty "

"What did she say?"

"Not much. She was talking to someone else while she picked up the phone She snapped at me, and after a minute we hung up."

I ran my tongue over my dry lips "Do you know if it was a man or a woman she was talking to?"

"I couldn't tell."

"Can you remember exactly what she said, *how* she sounded angry? This may be absolutely vital, Frank."

"I don't see what's vital about it."

"I want to know who she quarrelled with that day."

"Actually she did say something before she answered me on the phone, like finishing the tail end of what she'd been saying. Flowers or Towers . . . Anyway, she sounded pretty mad."

I said: "Did she just say the word 'Flowers'?"

"No. I think she said, 'What are you going to do, live with Flowers?' Or it could have been 'live at the Towers.' And then angrily into the phone. 'Hullo!' She sounded near hysterics, so after a word or two I shut off."

I sat staring out at the old hangars.

"Frank, is there a London telephone directory in this place, do you know?"

He hadn't seen one, but we went and looked. We searched round in all the old cupboards and drawers.

"What d'you want it for?" Dawson said.

"Just a hunch I'll try again when I get nearer home."

We walked out to my car. I said: "Frank, I've got to tell you. Something's cropped up that I can't explain. It may be days—perhaps much longer—before I get to the plant again. You'll have to manage as best you can."

"If there's a strike perhaps there won't be much to manage."

"There can't be a strike We can't afford it. In any case it's up to you and Read to find a way out. Because from now on—if I shouldn't be there—you've got to try to get on with him. You've *got* to."

He stared at me, wanting to fight but perhaps seeing that he must fight only himself "It'll be hard."

"Well, let it be hard."

I put out my hand and after a second he took it. "Okay, Mike, if it comes to that I'll do my best."

As I left the aerodrome a car passed me turning in.

I WAS in Brecon just before half past eight and in Gloucester as the cathedral bells were ringing for ten o'clock. I stopped there for petrol and bought a paper and walked along to one of the hotels to see if they had a directory. They produced one, and I began to turn the pages of the C's.

Nothing under the C's I tried the D's De, Do, Du du Caine. There were four Du Canes but only one spelling the name with an i, The Hon. Mrs Charles du Caine. She had two numbers One was for a Knightsbridge flat, the other was for The Towers, Epsom.

I put the phone books back and walked slowly down the empty street to my car. I sat in the car and reached for a cigarette but I was out of them, so I just sat. Was that the word Lynn had said? After about ten minutes I got out again and went back to the hotel. I rang Letherton 407.

Stella answered

I said: "Darling. This is Mike."

There was silence for a few seconds. "Hullo." She sounded queer.

"Is John back?"

"Yes . last night."

"Is it possible to speak to him?"

". . . No, I'm afraid not Oh, Mike, why didn't you tell me?"

"About? . . ."

"Yes, about her."

"I was scared "

"Where are you phoning from? No, don't tell me."

"Why? I'm on my way home——"

"No, don't say. It may be that . . . ." She didn't finish.

"What got into John last night? Why on *earth* did he go to London?"

"He gave me the slip, came back by taxi about midnight."

"Is he all right? .. Stella, what *is* it?

"He collapsed about five this morning. They've given him a blood transfusion."

"I'll come at once."

"No, Mike! No Hullo! Don't ring off for a moment. And don't come here. John gave me a message for you. He woke me about half past four—he said 'If Mike phones, tell him the wedding has to be stopped!'"

"The—wedding?"

"Yes. Does it make sense?"

I stared at the phone "It's coming to make sense. But I don't know how John knows "

"He said . 'Tell Mike it's up to him.'"

"Why shouldn't I come to see you?"

"Have you—read your Sunday papers?"

"No "

Words came suddenly, hurriedly. "I must go, Mike Someone at the door. Good luck, my darling Take care."

I said: "Stella, what about John?—Hullo!" But she had rung off.

Once again I walked back to the car. Stop the wedding, John said. Ray French was marrying Margot du Caine at three this afternoon. I had the invitation in my pocket. "What are you going to do, live at The Towers?" What were the legal consequences of marriage? That a wife or a husband couldn't be called in evidence against the other?

I looked at my watch. A little over four hours yet. But there was no legal way to stop a perfectly legal wedding.

And what had Stella meant by her guarded hints, as if she thought someone might be listening on the phone?

I got back to the car and opened the Sunday paper. At first there didn't seem anything of importance to me. Then I saw it at the bottom of the front page. It was a short paragraph but headed in strong black type: GIRL'S BODY FOUND IN CELLAR.

CHAPTER 7

SOMETIMES you go hot like that when the doctor is stitching up a cut or the dentist's drill goes on too long.

> Acting on information received, the police this evening entered a house at Hockridge, Beds, and found in the cellar the body of a woman believed to be Mrs. Lindsey Granville, 27, the wife of the owner. Mrs. Granville has been missing three weeks. A police officer declined to comment on the likely cause of death. The husband of the deceased, Mr. Michael Granville, factory owner and top-rank radar expert, has not yet been interviewed

I'd clung to the safety-valve too long. I might have expected it. Sergeant Baker hadn't looked like a man who spent his time growing roses

Mr. Michael Granville has not yet been interviewed. If that car turning in at the aerodrome was what I now thought it to be, it was by a matter of about ninety seconds that he had not yet been interviewed. . . .

I started the car and accelerated away through the quiet town. I could imagine Greencroft now, the reporters, the police, the whispering, peering people outside and, inside, the professional activity, the technical experts at work. By now Mrs Lloyd would have made her statement, the way I'd been carrying on in my own house with another woman, she'd seen it with her own eyes, the way I'd been reluctant to open the door to her that first morning. By now the police would have been to see Stella Tell me, Mrs. Curtis, how long have you known Mr. Granville? How often have you been to his home since Mrs. Granville disappeared?

And John Curtis was dying. You couldn't get away from what it added up to. Wasn't that following the code of conduct that he lived

by? Wasn't it true to his ideals that he should squander his failing vitality in some forlorn hope of helping a worthless self-seeker like me?

I stopped a couple of miles from Aylesbury and found a crumpled cigarette in the glove compartment and smoked that. Three hours to the wedding. What did a self-seeker do now?

John expected me to tackle Ray French in some way, to stop a wedding designed to prevent the police from coming at evidence that would clear me. How John had come to that conclusion I hadn't the faintest idea, but after what Frank had told me I was sure he was right. I knew who had been in the room on the afternoon Lynn died, and presumably Margot du Caine knew too. Somehow in the next three hours I had to devise some means of stopping Ray French from marrying her, even if it meant tackling him in his flat and tying him up. A delay in the wedding for even twenty-four hours might give time for the saving moves to be made.

While John Curtis quietly died in Letherton. That was it, wasn't it? It was all laid out on a plate for me. I saved myself and he died. As simple as that.

I chucked the cigarette away and started up the car. After about five miles I turned left again, away from London and towards Letherton.

THE COTTAGE might be watched. Stella was the woman in the case, and the police would expect me to turn up there. But a wood came down behind the cottage at the back, and a narrow lane, beginning at the Cock and Pheasant half a mile away, wound round to the other side of the wood. I took that.

About thirty yards separated the wood from the cottage, and at the last tree I took a good look round. No one I jumped over the hedge and made across the grass I didn't bother to knock. Stella was in the kitchen.

"Mike!" She stared at me with huge, dark-shadowed eyes.

"Are you alone?"

"At present. Except for John. I came down to refill his hot-water bottles. But if——"

"How is he?"

"He came round about nine. Mike, why ever did you come here when——"

"How did he get up to London last night?"

A bit startled by the way I said it, she told me.

"He sent me out for soda-water. When I got back he wasn't here; only a note. . . . Mike, the police have been here, asking. Did anyone see you come in?"

"I don't think so——"

"Darling, what a *terrible* thing; when John told me . . . . Who killed her, Mike?"

I said: "Tell me about John."

The kettle was boiling and she switched it off.

"A hæmorrhage about five. Dr. Lewis wanted to get him to the hospital but he was too weak They gave him a blood transfusion here. We couldn't get a nurse but the district nurse came in for a couple of hours. She'd just gone when the police came. . . ."

"What did they want to know?"

She began to fill the bottle. "They thought I might know where you were. I choked them off—made the excuse that John—— They're coming back later."

"Stella," I said, "what chance is there now for him?"

"Dr. Lewis didn't say much. This—this is the way people die of this complaint. But he's been better since about eleven "

"Can I go and see him?"

"Yes Yes, for a few minutes Can you tighten this stopper?"

I took the bottle from her. Her fingers were cold. "Did he tell you where he'd been last night?"

"Enough for me to know you ought to be in London now."

We looked at each other Then she turned to fill the other bottle. "He says he reasoned it out. This man you spoke of, Ray French, told you that Lynn was promiscuous, didn't he? Well, John reasoned that Ray French couldn't be wrong. That is—either he was right or he was lying."

"Yes, I see that."

"Then he thought *you* didn't think she was like that, but you might be deceived. Who else might know? The best chance was Simon Heppelwhite, who had employed Lynn for some years and who had been a great friend of hers."

"And what did Simon say?"

"He said no. He said Lynn was mad about Ray French; no one else.

He'd known about it for months, and had blamed Lynn for letting you down. She'd replied it was Ray she loved and she'd do everything in her power to divorce you and marry him."

I took the second bottle from her. "And then?"

As I spoke there was the sound of a heavy fall overhead.

Stella dropped the kettle and fled up the stairs, and I was close behind her.

We got in to see the bed empty and John sprawled upon the floor beside it. His skin when we rolled him over was nearly grey. "John," she said. "*John . . .* "

He was breathing, but there was no pulse at all.

I took his shoulders and she his feet He seemed a terrific weight. Somehow we got him back on the bed.

"He said he'd be all right while I went downstairs. He must have tried to get out and fallen. . . ."

Now that he was back in a normal position his breath was coming in deep gasps, like a man drowning.

"The doctor left something," Stella said, her lips trembling. "If he fainted again. That hypodermic."

I picked up the needle and held it up to the light. "Shall I do it?"

"Please."

I put the thing somehow into his arm and pressed it home.

"I'll get Dr. Lewis," she said. I nodded, and she left the room.

Perhaps my clumsy puncture had roused him. His eyelids fluttered and suddenly I found him looking straight at me. Without a sound he said my name.

"John," I said. "Don't talk."

He frowned. "You shouldn't—be here. Time is it?"

"Plenty of time yet."

"You—got my message?"

"Yes, it's all right. I'm going to act on it."

His eyes closed then. He'd gone off again. I felt for the pulse at the root of his neck, it was just there. On the table by the bed was a glass pot on a stand with a rubber tube and a filter, and a few other odds and ends. The light in here was distilled by the curtains, discreet and without shadows. After a bit I went to the window and looked out. The garden was empty

She came back. "He's not in, but they'll ring me as soon as they can find him." I nodded.

We were silent for a time The drug was having a good effect on him, but he hadn't come round again.

She said: "You *must* go, Mike. What time is the wedding?"

"There's time. What else did John tell you about last night?"

"He went to see Margot du Caine."

"*What?*"

"I'm only telling you what he told me. There was a girl with Simon Heppelwhite, a girl called Joy Fraser. She knows Margot and is going to her wedding today. I don't know what Joy Fraser said, but it came out that Ray French had been making a great attempt to get the wedding put forward. He almost had a row with everyone concerned."

"I still don't see why John——"

"He said, if Ray French was innocent, the haste to get married a week or so ahead of the scheduled date was hard to understand. If he was guilty, then the haste was easier to explain. You only had to look on Margot as an accessory, especially if she was an innocent one. . . . I don't know what he said to Joy Fraser, but whatever he said must have impressed her, because she took him straight along to the du Caines' flat and introduced him. He talked to the girl and to her mother, but whatever he tried didn't come off. They wouldn't believe him."

The man on the bed stirred and she was across to him instantly. But he made no other move, so she came back.

"You've got to go, Mike"

"Not while I can be of help. And I want to know why he went off as he did last night."

I think she saw what I meant "He wanted to help you and did help you without considering the cost to himself."

I looked at her. She was as close to me now as at any time last Sunday. I looked at the dark curling hair beside her ear, the sheen of her eyelashes and the curve of her lips. Last Sunday. But we'd come such a long way since then.

I said: "There's no way of saying what I feel without driving a horse and cart through it. But there are some things worse even than being accused of a murder you didn't commit."

As I stopped the telephone began ringing.

"I'll answer it," she said.

It was raining now. My watch said five minutes to one.

"Mike," said John.

I went quickly to him. His lips curved when I came into his view. Some of the dead whiteness had gone "Heard you—mumbling there. Stella been—telling you—my visit to Margot du Caine?"

"Yes. Don't talk now. Dr. Lewis is coming."

He made a face. "There was—no moving her, Mike. I could tell by the look in her eyes she knew *something*. But she pretended—didn't know. I told her—Lynn was dead. She said—unpardonable interference. Her mother—I think—she thought me insane But the girl did not. The girl did not

"You did your best.'

"It's—up to you, Mike. You've got to stop it."

I stared at him. There was a car drawing up outside the cottage

"John, I have to ask you one thing."

He closed his eyes for a couple of seconds and then looked at me. "Yes?"

"I want to know why you did that yesterday—getting up against all orders, nearly killing yourself."

He gave a faint shrug. "It looked to me—a fair and reasonable expenditure to make "

A door banged I said hastily: "Coming here I had the idea that perhaps you thought—Stella was in love with me, though why you should think that, God knows. . . . And that if you thought that you might—have taken—steps "

I watched him. He considered. "Done it—to kill myself?"

"I thought you might have considered it appropriate. It might go with your ethics. Helping the man you thought had taken your wife."

He smiled and his gaze didn't flicker. "I see you don't—understand me. Or you underrate my—liking for you."

"I don't understand *that*."

There were voices downstairs.

"Nor would it—go with my ethics, as you call them."

He paused, and then said with an effort "Wouldn't my doing that —have the opposite effect of what you think? Wouldn't that way—be putting a barrier between you and Stella—for ever?"

I stared at him and he stared back at me.

"Yes," I said.

There were footsteps on the stairs. "One is—not always detached, Mike. Don't make the mistake of thinking I am. I hate the misfortune that's come on me. But I don't hate you"

I put my hand on his. "I can't think of anything to say."

He returned the pressure. "Say nothing. But go."

Stella and Dr. Lewis came into the room.

I WAITED downstairs I knew it was cutting it impossibly fine now. On a Sunday afternoon, it was an hour from here to Chelsea. Fairly certainly, so far as the wedding was concerned, I'd lost the trick. But I didn't regret having come.

In about a quarter of an hour Stella came down.

"He's having another blood transfusion. Dr Lewis says he's responded well. I slipped down to tell you to go"

"He'll be all right?"

"As right as he can be Perhaps two weeks in bed Then he *may* get up again. . . ."

I peered out at the garden and the rain.

"Now do you feel free?" she said, almost angrily.

"Yes, I feel free."

It was a queer expression of the way I was at present fixed. I kissed her and left This was the final good-bye and had to be excused.

I GOT through the wood to the edge of the lane without trouble. My car was where I had left it, and I was going to climb over the low wall and go towards it when some sixth sense made me decide to have a look first from another spot. I ducked back into the wood and approached the lane this time from about a hundred yards ahead I didn't get far. In a gateway of the wood just out of sight of the car, conveniently placed to step out at the right moment, a policeman was waiting

ONCE out of the wood at the eastern corner, you were at the edge of the town; and from there it was only two hundred yards through back streets to the station. Of course they might be waiting for me, but that was a risk that had to be taken.

There was a train in ten minutes. That was lucky for a Sunday, but it didn't alter the fact that it takes an hour and five minutes from Letherton to the station in London, and from there I had to get to Chelsea.

It still didn't matter as much as it should have. Even in practical terms my visit to the cottage hadn't been thrown away. If I hadn't been there John Curtis would have died on the floor. I didn't think I'd proved anything by going to see him; but I'd behaved like a fool two or three times in the last few days, and this time at least I hadn't been trying to save myself.

The train was five minutes late. I got on it all right and settled into the corner of a third-class carriage; doors slammed and the dirty, smoke-grey engine stammered on the greasy lines. We were off. But it was nearly three before we stopped at New Barnet, and from there on into a darkening city with the sky yellow and a downpour settling in, the train crept forward as if scared of being checked at every signal. As we slid along the platform of King's Cross station I opened the door of the carriage, got out quickly and made down the platform. No taxi was waiting but I caught one in Euston Road. It was twenty past three, but there might have been some delay.

"St James's Church, Eaton Place."

While we were on the way I took out the wedding invitation. The reception afterwards was at the Royal Hotel, which was in King's Road. Where the couple were spending the night I didn't know; he'd said they were to stay in London

As we turned into Eaton Place it was ten to four. There were no cars waiting and I knew it was all over. The taxi stopped outside the church and I got out. Bits of sodden confetti lay trampled in the rain. The church was dark and empty. I walked up as far as the altar and back. There was a nice show of flowers.

I went out to the taxi again and stood for a few seconds. A lunatic interruption at the wedding might have had some result. Nothing could come from breaking into the wedding reception Nothing really could help now at all

"If I was you, mate, I should get back in. You'll be drier there."

I said: "Drive me to a telephone box, will you?"

We purred round a couple of streets, and on the way I thought out a list of the ten best hotels.

I borrowed some change from the driver and began. When the first one answered I asked to speak to Mr. Raymond French. After a pause the operator said: "I'm sorry, sir, there's no one of that name staying in the hotel." I tried five and got the same answer from each. At the sixth there was a longer pause, then the girl said: "I'm sorry, there's no reply from the suite." I said thank you, and rang off.

It was an hotel overlooking Hyde Park. I got back in the taxi and told the driver to take me there.

THERE WAS nothing more to lose now and I could wait.

I went into the hotel tea lounge, which was convenient for seeing people coming in and out of the revolving doors; and, being Sunday, it was quiet. After a while I began to feel dizzy so I ordered tea. I drank it and thought about things. A few well-dressed people were about now, talking in brittle voices, but I didn't take my eyes off the doors. It was a quarter to five. The police would be getting anxious about Mr. Michael Henry Granville, factory owner and top-rank expert, who had not yet been interviewed. Perhaps Mr. Michael Henry Granville was on the run.

I paid my bill and went over to the magazine counter for some cigarettes. I'd not had any real desire to smoke for some hours, but one had to have something to do.

While I stood there, a black-coated employee beside me asked, "Who are those for?" and a page boy with a box of orchids in his hands replied, "Four-two-six. Name of French."

"Take this letter up with you, will you? Give it to Ferguson of room service. Same floor."

I'd paid for my cigarettes before the words properly sank in. The page boy had got into the lift. I stood and watched the doors close. A cigarette was unlit in my hand. I walked across to the lift on the opposite side of the foyer.

"Four," I said to the attendant.

We went imperceptibly up. The attendant flashed his lighter for me but I shook my head. As the door slid open I said: "Which way is four-two-six from here?"

"To your right, sir, then left at the end of the passage."

I followed the directions. In the third passage a door was open. As I got near it the page boy was just coming out.



I said: "Oh, have you brought something for me?"

He smiled.

"Yes, sir. Or I think perhaps it's for madam."

"Good. Thank you." I gave him half a crown.

I went in and the door closed behind me Then I had time and breath to light the cigarette.

A DRAWING-ROOM with french windows and a balcony, a lavender-blue

bedroom, a bathroom leading off. The card with the orchids said: "To my darling Margaret from her adoring Ray." Not much personal in the bedroom except one suit-case marked already with the trophies of travel: HOTEL SPLENDIDE, DEAUVILLE; HOTEL DU PARC, BRUXELLES. On the bureau were half a dozen labels neatly printed: FRENCH, S.S. OTRANTES, STATEROOM BAGGAGE.

The hotel was very quiet People went out of London on a summer week-end. The french windows were ajar and I closed them. Freckles of rain had been falling on the edge of the cinnamon-coloured carpet. With the windows shut it was still quieter.

There was a telephone in the drawing-room cunningly disguised in the writing-desk, and another phone by the bed. I went into the bedroom and hesitated and then lifted the phone and asked the hotel operator to get me Letherton 407.

In a little while, a voice said: "Letherton 407."

"Darling," I said. "Stella, darling . . . ."

"Mike, where are you?"

"Never mind. Have the police been again?"

"Yes, a few minutes after you left. Are you in London?"

"Yes. But they got my car."

"So they told me. What about the wedding?"

"It went on. How's John?"

"Sleeping now. But Mike——"

"Don't worry about the wedding. Are the police still there?"

"Oh, no, they left as soon as they knew you'd gone. It was Sergeant Baker. John insisted on seeing him. Are Ray French and this girl——"

"What did he say to the police? D'you know?"

"One thing, Mike, I must tell you. It was John who first told the police. About Lynn being dead and where she was. I didn't know that until this afternoon."

I said: "I can't believe. If he——"

"Well, listen. Apparently what he did was——"

I said: "I'll have to ring off now. I'm sorry. I'll ring you again as soon as I can."

"But Mike——"

I put the phone down. Ray French was standing in the doorway of the bedroom watching me.

CHAPTER 8

SOMETIMES you wait for a moment, and when it comes you don't know what to do with it

Ray said: "Don't bother about me, old boy. There's no need to cut it short on my account."

I got up and picked my cigarette out of the ash-tray. "I'm sorry I couldn't get to the wedding."

He shrugged. "These affairs are never passionately interesting, are they, except to the people concerned." He threw his gloves on the bed, passed a hand over his sleek hair, straightened his jacket with a brief downward tug

"It wasn't lack of interest."

"Well, I expect you had your plate pretty full, didn't you?"

"Full of what?"

His eyes came back from the mirror and went over me. There wasn't much expression on his face. It was like an empty house "I haven't seen the papers but somebody told me. What's been going on, Mike? Is Lynn really dead? I can't tell you how distressed I am "

"She's dead," I said "I really came along to ask you why you killed her."

It might have been a stone, the question thrown at him like that There was a flicker of dislike round his eyes and lips as he turned back into the drawing-room.

I followed quickly, thinking he might be going to call some member of the hotel staff, but instead he went across to a table where there was a siphon and a glass.

"How thirsty marriage makes one I'll phone down for some whisky——"

"Where's Margot?"

"Downstairs."

I said · "That night at Glyndebourne was the first time Lynn saw you with her, wasn't it? I thought she was raging at me that night, but really she was raging at you "

He went to the french windows, opened them, stood frowning out at the day.

"I hope this wind drops before tomorrow. Margot's not at all a good sailor."

I said: "Doesn't it worry you that I may hang for something you did?"

"It worries me that you may hang," he said over his shoulder. "As your friend, that worries me badly. But if I had done what you say, the alternative would worry me more." He sighed. "Oh well, that's what life's like. I'll get the whisky."

He moved to go round me into the bedroom, but I got in his way.

He smiled at me. It was a pretty queer smile. "What is this, Mike—a hold-up?"

I said: "I suppose what Lynn was hoping to do was manœuvre me into a position where I might agree to a divorce and a large permanent settlement on her, a larger share of the partnership—not alimony which would stop if she married you. She loved you but she knew you had to be bought."

His good-fellowship was losing its brightness. It was like a badge, suddenly tarnished.

"And supposing that was her aim, would you have done it?"

"Done what?"

"Agreed to settle a larger income on her without conditions?"

I screwed out my cigarette. "I suppose you thought you couldn't risk it. Was that it?"

"Always supposing that was the set-up, it would, I admit, have been a dubious point."

I watched him. "And then Margot came along, eh?"

"You tell me." He had moved back into the drawing-room.

I said: "I don't know why you went down to see Lynn at home that last afternoon, and I don't know what part Margot took in it. But I think you'd probably been playing them both along until the last minute, and Lynn, having seen you with Margot at Glyndebourne, and being full of anxiety, decided to bring things to a head by bullying her lawyer into filing a petition at once. Probably on the Thursday morning she phoned you to say, 'Darling, I'm leaving Mike tonight and coming to the flat; can you meet me there?' That sort of thing? And you had the job of going to tell her you were going to marry Margot after all."

He had taken the carnation out of his button-hole and was sniffing it.

The flower looked faded, and after a minute he crumpled the stem between his manicured pianist's fingers.

I said: "Surely you didn't take Margot with you, to reason with this —'party girl.'"

He smiled again and said: "Lynn was an exciting woman. Usually you don't find women like her with a high standard of morals. But I really believe she'd been faithful to you until I came along. After that there was never anyone else at all."

For the first time there was something in his voice. Some flickering memory had caught fire.

I said: "If you felt that way about her, why did you turn her down?"

"You've already arrived at the answer, my dear Mike. Money. Just money."

In spite of his care he was talking There was life after all in the empty house.

"When you're wealthy, old boy, it's easy to live on a lofty moral plane. You are in a well-paid racket. You get thousands of pounds for making repulsive little air-borne computers. My racket is a badly paid one. Except for a dozen at the top we artistic fools who make music may starve to death for all the public or the state cares. When I was in my teens, Mike, I used to practise the piano seven and eight hours a day. I thought I was going to make a baker's dozen of the top twelve. But not so. I can play Beethoven and Schumann and Busoni with such technical *expertise* that in your profession I should more than get by. In my profession I don't quite get by. So I'm expected to rot in the gutter like an old banana skin."

He bent his head, pulling bits of the flower off and dropping them on the floor.

"Not any more I am unwilling to rot or to starve. I like the good things of life. Caviare tastes as well on my lips as on yours. So I've had to scrape the barrel and use a gift for pleasing women. I'll give you a few tips some time."

"I understand a lot but I don't understand why you had to kill her."

He was at last left with only the stalk of the white carnation in his fingers.

"My dear man, if you have any suspicions confide them to the police It's perfectly obvious to me that you put her under the coal yourself."

I said: "Were you smiling as usual when you dragged her into the cellar and shovelled coal over her?"

His eyes twitched. "Was that how you did it?"

I said: "Lynn was my wife, Ray. I know now I didn't love her or look after her as I should have done. I shall always blame myself for that. But she didn't deserve to be—broken like that, buried——"

The telephone in the bedroom began to whir.

I don't think he had noticed the phone, its cut-off switch in the "off" position He made a move towards the bedroom door. I got in his way again. "I'll answer it," I said.

"I'm sorry You won't."

I had turned to go into the bedroom myself, but he gripped my arm I shoved him away. He leaned back, dropping his hands, but before I could get into the bedroom he had grabbed my other arm, pulled me and himself three or four paces into the drawing-room. We stopped, breathing hard, hesitating on the edge of worse

The phone went on.

He made a move to go round me, but I caught at him and we lurched against the wall, slid along it I could smell the stuff of his suit, the cigarette smoke on his breath. Anger suddenly caught at me, and I swung at his smooth, clean face. Knuckles on it, pleasure in marking, in damaging.

Suddenly his face changed, twisted, and he came for me with both hands; as I raised mine he kicked violently up at my knee. I lurched away and he followed and caught my flying arm, wrenched at it; I fell across his shoulder and was flung over it five feet across the room

It was like being knocked out by an iron door. I had just sense and control enough to lie still, I could just see the hazy light from the window and his shadow standing over me. I thought he was going to kick me again, but the phone, which had been silent, began again. He went out to it

I rolled over and got to my knees and tried to lose the meal I hadn't eaten.

Then I began to crawl towards the phone in the writing-desk I got to it but couldn't get up so had to pull it down. I switched the cut-off to "on" Then I lay on the floor with my ear to the receiver.

A cautious voice saying: ". . . fortunate to get you a seat on the

twenty twenty-eight for Brussels. There happened to be just one seat left, sir."

"That's via Sabena?"

"Yes, sir. Leaving Waterloo at seven. Er—do I understand you'll not be occupying your suite tonight?"

There was a pause.

"I shall not, but—er—my wife . . . she'll be here later. But if you'll make out my account now . . . ."

"Certainly, sir. Shall we send the air ticket up?"

"No, I'll collect it. Oh, and—er—will you see that the suite is *on no account* disturbed—until my wife comes, that is I shall be leaving some private papers about. . . ."

"Of course, sir. I'll send up instructions."

"Thank you." There was a click.

I didn't bother to try to put the phone back. It took all I had to get to my feet.

I looked round for something handy and saw the soda siphon. I made across to it and picked it up. Ray came out of the bedroom and stood against the door.

He said: "Feeling ill? You pale lily-fingered scientists bending over a bench all day, you've got no guts. You should try being an artist for a few weeks. It would get you in condition."

I didn't say anything.

His glance strayed to the dangling telephone.

After a pause he said: "Murder's one of the rarer experiences, isn't it? You can't qualify or divide it. And at the time perhaps you don't want to."

The teeth were showing at last I said: "Why aren't you taking Margot with you?"

He walked over and slammed the telephone back on its rest. "Have you ever seen Lynn in a temper—suddenly white-hot, an electric wire short-circuiting? Have you? Has she ever come at you with her nails, wanting to scratch your eyes out? What did you do in self-defence against the sweet girl? Did you fight Marquis of Queensberry rules? I was in the Commandos, my dear Mike, while you were hatching nasty electronic eggs in your safe little back room In the Commandos they teach you fascinating technical tricks of another kind. The only thing

they don't teach you is that some people's necks break easier than others. Lynn's must have been very flimsy. I let her go as soon as she dropped her claws."

By moving to the telephone he had halved the distance between us.

He said savagely: "It was a hell of a way to hide her, but when it comes to the point you find that the corny place is the only place. I knew the police would look there."

I said: "Why did you come back the following night?"

"I'd left a gramophone catalogue that wasn't due to be published until the following week What made you come now, today? What's put you on to me again?"

"Hasn't your marriage shut down on all the evidence you hoped it might?"

He wiped the back of his hand across his mouth, which was swelling at the corner.

"I'm not married, my dear Mike."

We stared at each other. A clock somewhere was chiming the half-hour.

He said: "Was it some friend of yours who called on Margot last night, told her Lynn had been murdered, shook her innocent faith in what I'd told her? Was it?"

"Yes."

"She didn't believe him then but she rang me after. I pacified her, told her he was a madman. I think she believed me. But then the newspapers came today. . . . That settled it. I've just left her after three hours. She must have a week's postponement."

He looked at the siphon I held. "Well, she'd have been a dull woman to live with, dull after Lynn."

He was leaning now with his hands on the back of a chair. I said. "Then it's really you that's on the run."

"Not yet. But now that you've pushed in . . . I hope your neck is stronger than hers."

I said: "Lynn was my wife"

His eyes twitched again. "She wasn't much good, you know, not at heart. But she was good in other ways. She'd no thought for *anyone* but me. Not a thought in her head or her body. Her neck broke like chalk in my hands. It broke, and she was dead. I thought she'd fainted——"

He swung with the chair in front of him as I lifted the siphon. They jarred in mid-air and the siphon slid down the wood, hit his fingers. The chair dropped but the siphon was knocked out of my hands Across the falling stuff I jumped at him, glad now of this; we fell to the floor, rolled over.

I knocked his fingers from my throat, got his; he tried to drag himself away, I hung on, glad of it, glad of it

Something hit me across the eyes like blindness and fell beside me, the siphon; he thrust himself clear and was on top, at the third try he got his fingers where he wanted; they were slippery, but they held and tightened.

I plucked at his face and he stretched out of reach. Pressure on my neck stopped the blood. I knew, so far as knowledge was still there, that this last protest was over; no air was left.

The hangman's noose slackened as I died, like finding the reprieve of eternity.

Ray French was standing over me and the room focused occasionally and he'd swung away, three, four steps, while air passed like whooping-cough through my throat. I moved my head an inch and that brought sounds and pain back.

Someone was putting a key in the door.

It came open as Ray faced it A man I knew came in, a middle-aged man dressed like a shop-walker. And there was another man, and behind them someone from the hotel.

Ray said· "Stay where you are."

The man said sombrely· "Look, Mr. French, I'd advise you to do nothing silly" He glanced at me. "Hobbs . . . ."

The man behind him began to move but Ray said again· "Stay where you are."

No one stirred for a few seconds. Then Sergeant Baker took another step.

"I'll have to ask you to be reasonable, Mr. French"

Ray turned sharply and walked out of the french windows. Baker shouted and leaped after him but it was too late. There was a shadow on the balcony and then no shadow. He might have dematerialized, because there was no other sound, no cry, and we were too high even to hear the fall.

It was dark as I came out of Scotland Yard, and the rain had cleared at last. I didn't know the time because my watch had stopped at twenty-five to six; the glass was starred, a hand broken.

My head still thumped between the eyes and I walked with a limp. Baker had offered me a car as far as Letherton, but I said no, I'd stay in London tonight. "I think it will be all right, Mr. Granville," he'd said; "but don't go far away until after the inquest, *please*. Perhaps I can call on you tomorrow?"

A formidable person, Baker. I couldn't feel yet that it was all right; everything had happened too quickly; and anyway the "all right" that Baker spoke of covered the narrowest field and left all the most complicated issues outside.

I turned up towards Trafalgar Square. They'd booked me a room by phone at the usual hotel and had offered to run me there, but I'd said I'd walk. So I walked.

Baker had said: "Your phone call to Mrs. Curtis just did the trick; we had the line tapped by then; I'd just got back to the Yard when the message came. Lucky for you . . . . It's a bad thing to conceal things from the police, Mr. Granville."

Conceal things from the police. I'd just signed a statement in which nothing was concealed except all the things that counted—such as my hurt from Lynn and my love for Stella and my overriding obligation to . . . . "You've a good friend in Dr. Curtis. If it hadn't been for him—an inspired guess of his about French and Miss du Caine. Of course it was more than a guess. When I saw him this afternoon he gave me his reasons. Not proof as we need it, but it has helped us to *find* the proof."

I crossed Horse Guards Avenue.

Someone stared at the plaster on my forehead, and I stopped to look for a taxi, because I found walking wasn't in my line after all. But none came so I went on.

While I was having first-aid treatment Baker had been to see Margot du Caine.

"I had the greatest difficulty in persuading her to talk," he said. "Human nature's a strange thing. She was very distraught, blaming herself that she didn't marry him after all." He paused for a while, brooding. "You see, she loved him."